National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

NL-339 (r. 88/04) c

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SEVEN DAY WEEKEND

BY

NEIL SCOTTEN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1990.

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

ISBN 0-315-60367-4

NL-339 (r. 88/04) c

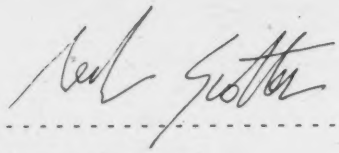
Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Neil Scotten
TITLE OF THESIS: Seven Day Weekend
DEGREE: M.A.
YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1990

PERMISSION IS HEREBY GRANTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY TO REPRODUCE SINGLE COPIES OF THIS THESIS AND TO LEND OR SELL SUCH COPIES FOR PRIVATE, SCHOLARLY OR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES ONLY.

THE AUTHOR RESERVES OTHER PUBLICATION RIGHTS, AND NEITHER THE THESIS NOR EXTENSIVE EXTRACTS FROM IT MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION.



(Student's signature)

#11, 12105 102 Ave, Edmonton,

AB., T5N 0L5

(Student's Permanent Address)

DATE: April 10th, 1990.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT THEY HAVE READ, AND RECOMMEND TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE, A THESIS:
ENTITLED: Seven Day Weekend
SUBMITTED BY: Neil Scotten
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

Professor G. Hollingshead _____

Professor G. Burger _____

Professor F. Radford _____

Professor R. Darnell _____

DATE: April 10th, 1990.

SEVEN DAY WEEKEND

A FANZINE

BY NEIL SCOTTEN

FOR CLIVE PUGH

KELLY

A West London flyover whisks distressed workers back to suburbs and Home Counties estates. Every day, the journey rewound and played back. In the morning, passengers may look left to contemplate the Cinzano clock. Blue, bullet-shaped, in some minds it might recall highlife commercials: TV flashes of blond people and skis crash with the everlasting Sunday browns and greys of Chiswick and Hammersmith. It hasn't advertised the hour since the buildings beneath were ploughed and a powerline missed from a blueprint was cut. Now the Cinzano clock teeters on rusty steel legs, inelegantly scabbed with post-baby-boom concrete.

Every day, drive another ninety seconds for the Lucozade sign. Tacked on a pebble-dashed pink wall, a yellow outlined champagne glass fills with yellow electric light from an emptying yellow bottle. Above it, though the 'E' in 'Energy' has blown, is the legend, **Lucozade - The Energy Giving Glucose Drink**. An optimistic slogan for the workbound. Minds aimed at 9am clip themselves to commissions and rises, the stairs and not the lift, begin to merge with the brown skin and orange Speedo beauties of the zest supplements, fill with the low-tar cigarette business scenarios flattened on hoardings. Lessons to hoard. Convenient screens of slatted wood that hide the shattered high rises behind.

The regulation speed limit gives only a few frames of the sequence, yet this yellow exchange continues all day, has continued for thirty years, give or take the Seventies power strikes. Homebound the flyover angles and now invisible the yellow drama is lost in the contusion of the excited sodium and purple sky. Behind recedes the *Blade Runner* cityscape.

Homebound. Motorway minds review the day. Distractedly. Invent new endings. Redress cuts, snubs, cold shoulders and put-downs. Homebound minds think different thoughts. Workbound ones have drained away. Home is a happy place for some. Others? Homebound.

Warble. Warble. Telephone. Twizzle. (Sod this knotted cord.) Twizzle.

- What? Yes, it's me. I've got a cold. No, I gave up. You'll have to put up with my voice sounding funny. No. I wasn't. I'm staying in bed. Yes. I watched it. It was lousy. He can't act. I didn't pay that much attention. I'll bite my tongue out, I'm not kyding. Nothing. There was interference. Some French or Russian station. Maybe the ionosphere has cracked up completely. No. No. In bed. Staying in bed. I hate them. Staying in bed.

Topographically speaking Kelly lives a symmetrical life, in a small room above a butcher's, now a video shop, on the tip of an isosceles triangle with the Cinzano clock and the Lucozade sign at its base. There is no covering on the front window. Kelly likes to stretch out in bed and watch the new purple and green video sign flash on and off against the white walls and ceiling. Lying there, the assorted furniture alternately solarised then lost in half darkness, the effect is of Philip Marlowe or Lew Archer on a stakeout. Holed up in a seedy motel room with only a bull-nosed .38 for company. After hours, on a dark night, sliding through the uneven slats of a venetian blind on the flyover side, lemon stripes tiger the matt patches of the white satin sheen paint. Trouble, at the moment, is Kelly's business: dreamsleuthing amongst the manzanita of Idle Valley.

Warble. Twizzle.

- What time is it? Don't come round. I'm ill. The radio. I don't know. Some station or other. Look, why bother? With phoning. With me. Cliche. Yes. Interesting. How can a person that .... Yes. Yes. Be interesting? About four. Shopping.

<u>Monday 29th</u>

Monday morning. Thank Christ I'm on the late shift today. Dale phoned again last night. What a persistent woman. I gave her the bubonic plague excuse. Maybe I should reciprocate. I love her lithe neck and tiny ears. Maybe it would be better to have the phone disconnected. I'm off to buy a watch. One that I saw on the Saturday fitness programme,

before *Banana Man*. Must get fit. Sinuous, vital and lovely. It's expensive so I'll probably starve before the end of the month. The old excuse. Things not people.

Jaded Monday morning Kelly squelches the multi-dialled fifteen-band radio across the time zones of the world. On the flyover side the city fills. Ruffians on mountain bikes play indecently between the legs of the blue clock; stretch to add their indecent slogans to the accumulated graffiti. Within the pale room, clothing is adjusted. Black on black. T-shirt black, black shirt embossed for the tactile sense. Grey jeans, skin-pink in one knee, originally black, socks black backgammon spangled grey. Industrial work shoes, black. Earrings, Lucozade yellow. Radio wails as flyover cars drag past the eye.

Warble.

Down the duckegg blue stairwell, Kelly crashes out the door aboard a Walkman squall of sound.

Don't start me talking. I could talk all night.

Past a collapsed cardboard box, past the dripping legend **Poly-Stirene Dreams**, Kelly hesitates, then bursts through the fire door on a change. Always a sucker for a three chord trick.

Kelly stops the music with a snap. Outside, Euphemia Waite adjusts her purple oyster hat then ruffles her bags ready for the ascent up the stairwell. Euphemia Waite is a character. A former Twenties flapper, she danced the pavane and galliard round party pools spread with violet petals, played bezique until 4am and used words like 'ghastliness'. Not quite on queer street, she maintains appearances. Looks like the dowager in a mystery novel, though she lives on tinned pilchards and supermarket specials. Arbitrarily a dialogue ensues.

- Kelly, have you seen my salamander brooch?
- Your what?

- My salamander brooch. I may have misplaced it returning last night from a hard evening's cribbage. It was a little knick-knack Cyril bought me on our Italian tour in '32.

- No, I haven't. Someone ...

- It may be that I removed it before I left. But then I always substitute my banjo brooch. I find the pearl sets off my earrings rather nicely.

- A girl got raped the other day only half a mile from here, at only ...

- I will ring Harrods immediately and see if they can furnish a replacement.

- It was only just after ten as well. Are mince pies still on special offer at KeyMarkets?

Euphemia Waite collects her bags and spurning the fire door heads for the residents' entrance. Kelly rewinds. F sharp to G major; a half-tone holds its breath between the dominant and the tonic. Chords may be like Verbs.

I could talk all night. My mind is sleepwalking.
While I'm putting the world to rights.

The voice sneer-sings of unemployment, capital punishment, of taxes on white sticks for the blind, of a country going to the dogs. On the beat, pacing out the wheeling chords, Kelly curls at the lip, menaces the stage, spits, throws an orange juice carton into the audience, flashes the follow spotlights off a sweat-streaked blue and tortoiseshell guitar, jerks the tremolo arm to a contortion of sound, before storming into the wings in a blare of feedback like a hundred pneumatic hammers cracking on the green-grey wreathed stones of Parliament.

Putting the world to rights. Called career information.
Have you got yourself an occupation?

Warble. Warble. Warble.

The faint wash of traffic carries into an empty room. Bitter dust plays around the diseased stalks of the Cinzano clock whilst a figure like a burst sofa props a ladder against the pink

building and climbs. Two rungs from the top a yellow bulb pops out from a breast pocket and smashes with a delicate pop in the parking lot below.

Black Kelly avoids *Talk all night. My mind* the deranged neon shouts of the shopping centre. Kelly's eye catches *yourself an occupation* two figures on a tiled bench. The leather-jacket-and-studs-man looks at Kelly with something like desire. Leather is with a girl. She strokes the Popeye tattooed on his forearm. Kisses him back to attention. Mine.

In The Sports Shoe, Kelly is a mote in the eye. Assistants with their Charles Atlas digestive systems look askance, hoover their gaze over security mirrors. Colonic chromium and coordinated plastique harry from all sides. Contorted winning-line faces advertise the comfort of Nike and New Balance, whilst facing a wall of touted left-shoes, (health colours, pink for girls, blue for boys, pure whites chased with suede) a yard-long smile speaks for the benefits of a corrugated stomach. Kelly quails as the assistant rifles through to the cheapest watches. Beneath her monogrammed tennis shirt and olive green joggers breathes a fearsome body. Lithe, efficient, with Daryl Hannah hair and Jane Seymour eyes. Even the cheapest is beyond Kelly, but still the water-resistant-alarm-chronometer-60-minute-timer is bought; the driving force in a fazed televisional collision of tanned bodies, cellulite remedies and the winning snap of the finishing tape.

Wednesday 31st

A lousy two days at work. Ricci said this time the magazine really is going down and I'd better look for something else. Managed to avoid Dale though the phone hasn't rung atall for two days now. Is this what I want or not? Sometimes I get browned off with being on my own all the time. Work, while I have it, is not much better, shut away in that tiny paste-up room. I cookd myself a lasagne tonight. Didn't have the green pasta but it turned out well because I used my new aerobics watch to time it. Bought a roller blind to cut out that godawful glare from the video shop.

Have you got yourself an occupation? 6pm. The city empties. Traffic charges over but does not displace the bottomless supply of yellow as it reflects on the rain wet road. Kelly clicks off the music, stares at the ceiling then flicks through the repeats on TV.

Warble. Twizzle.

- Yes. I'm. No. Losing my job. Sound depressed? Maybe it was the piece of grit in my sandwich. Cure? No I don't. Euthanasia. Thursday. No money. In bed. Watching TV. Robert Mitchum having a conversation with a soft focus woman. Where? No. In a tin bath.

Flashing blue lights flash on the wall from the flyover side. A fluorescent figure sweeps away the last of the broken glass from a three car pile-up.

BLOWOUT HORROR- One dead, two critically injured. The authorities are witholding names until relatives have been contacted

Vital signs drain away. **Lucozade - The Energy-Giving Glucose Drink**. The yellow hourglasses its message. As the police car glides away its blue lights beat over Kelly's sleeping face.

Sleepwalking. The crowbar-grey segments of Commander Kelly's watch devour the seconds. Washing over the submarine's grey steel plates the sea sucks in and out of the diesel vents, raising clouds of steam. From the conning tower, Kelly follows the white bubbling torpedo trails as they converge on a pale ship in the distance. For a moment the target is lost behind a curtain of spray and with a grim smile Kelly snaps the watch stopped. Minutes pass. Distant cries are heard. Binoculars pick out amongst the burning oil, a walking stick and a baby's bonnet. "Take no prisoners".

Warble. Warble. Twizzle.

- What do you think? Running on the spot? Asleep. No. No. It's too late.

<u>Friday 2nd</u>

godawful glare from the video shop. Dale phoned twice tonight. Should I file a charge of harassment? She wanted to come round but it was too late thank goodness. Quite a good

film on TV although of 'the beautiful girl and her friend' type. Her friend had glasses. They always have and always do miss out. Dot Parker was right.

Career information. West London flyover signs blur blue and yellow as Toni Olsen and Marc Flaghetti unwind the footage into the smog-dusted cityscape. 6.30am. Inside this year's car this year's smells dance around this season's clothes. Armani and Klein, Body Shop and Dior, Puig and Westwood. Next please. Graphically equalised Vivaldi comes as if from nowhere. Their hands touch. Committee at nine. Report at ten. Eleven o'clock jog. Roger's birthday present? That backgammon set. Can they meet for lunch? Not today. Their hands touch. Burgundy and brown briefcases in the back slide apart. Three o'clock meeting. Meeting two o'clock. Proposals to prepare. Cases to finish. Kids between seven and nine. TV till twelve. Hands adjust Westwood trinkets and Armani accessories. Workbound.

Caught between Cinzano blue and Lucozade yellow, the faint snarl of their electronically fuel injected engine slips over Kelly twisted in nylon sheets. *Have you got yourself an occupation?*

Warble. Warble. Twizzle.

> - Yes. What time is it? No. At eight. No. I'm working late. No. Thinking. About? The significance of. No. Handsome is as handsome does. Think too much? What time is it? At eight.

Career Information. Advertising safe sex, the chatter of the fifteen band radio competes with the multi-toned suck of the city's daily refill. With a digital aerobic squeak black-on-black Kelly heads for work.

<u>Tuesday 6th</u>

Ricci gave me my notice today. So much for government support of small businesses. I feel like stocking up on black stars, shaving my head and becoming an anarchist. No jobs in the papers. Dale continues to ring. Now I'm unemployed at least she can come round again and, if she has any sense, find out that I'm not quite as exotic as she thinks. Maybe

she's happy with a voice on the end of a phone. Went shopping yesterday and spent too much.

My mind is vinyl-backed chairs set around the pink concrete of the poolside. Lithe bodies in Lycra swimsuits sip wines and cocktails. Just out of the depth of field, hazed bodies, bulbous, muscular, pump through physical jerks, the background for two arguing figures. The enviable physique of one is brought out by a snug-fitting green shirt with pearl buttons and a button-down collar. Green Shirt's gaze is direct, powerful. It masters the man dressed in an insurance broker's suit, the vent of his jacket splayed out over a pair of slacks that are too short. He storms off. Green Shirt walks confident beside the pool as the camera pulls in admiring glances. A drink is accepted and Green Shirt's profile fills the screen. The picture fades.

WHERE ELSE CAN YOU BUY A HONDA PRELUDE AND RECEIVE
A FREE FUNROOF AND BLAUPUNCKT RADIO?

Career information yellow pulses indiscriminately through the early evening as Toni Olsen and Marc Flaghetti cruise off to the suburbs to relieve their *au pair*. On different sides of the back seat lie brown and burgundy briefcases. They do not have their joke about the blue clock and its immovable hands. Vivaldi plays and their hands do not touch.

Warble. Warble.

Don't start me talking I could

- Yes? A record. No. Money. No don't. Think too much. Yes. I. No. Feel that way. TV? Repeats. In bed. A long time. Staying in bed.

Have you got yourself an occupation? On the flyover side Kelly's blind is pulled shut. The room is drab without the flashing TV and the purple-green Raymond Chandler video sign. In the round mirror Kelly's face approximates panic as the new green shirt bunches up around the chunky aerobics watch and droops over narrow shoulders. Kelly's mind pulls shut.

IN THE SEVENTIES

In the seventies I had friends of a sort. I took numerous jobs. I began to feel less happy.

I bought a cheap car and smashed myself up when the accelerator cable stuck jamming the throttle wide open.

I heard of a friend who pushed a safety pin through her mouth and poured coffee on her hair to make it stick up. That was the punk thing. I mutilated my hair and wore oversize tweed jackets with jeans. I cracked two ribs at a concert when a thousand other spiky young people squashed into the crash barrier.

I was plagued with a recurrent dream and gave up sleep for a month. A red and black comic strip face from my *Beano* days would loom out of the dark. I had to run and find this villain before he killed my father. A friend of mine said the dream meant I was looking for something but I didn't give a toss for all that Freud shit.

I knew an older man called Chris. As the result of an industrial accident he wore a false eye. One summer we went on holiday to Rome. We sat in the crowded Vatican cafeteria and discussed the holiness of the water in our tea. At this point his glass eye chose to swivel itself loose. Covering his face he made for the toilets to make adjustments, shrivelling at the cruel Italian stares. Chris was a sweet sad man. A few years later he took early retirement, tended his garden for a while then died.

My friends disowned me as a hopeless case when I dropped out of school. I went to work for a large corporation that made ejector seats for fighter planes. My friends dropped out a year later.

I fell disastrously in love with an unmarried mother, got rejected then got drunk then came home bashed my head against the wall then failed to hang myself.

I fell for the dark-skinned Avon lady and spent a fortune on soaps-on-a-rope, after-shave balm, bubble-bath and hundreds of other unnecessary male cosmetics.

I felt more and more that personal relationships were impossible.

When the sun was shining I would stay in and watch TV from morning till closedown. Anything, children's programmes, menopausal chat shows, black and white Robinson Crusoe repeats with wavering music that reminded me of the 8mm sex education films showed to us on a cheap projector at school.

I sat in a bar with Jack Lemmon and talked bimetallism. Later we went back to his place and he gave me a nice suit.

I studied to become a streetwise dropout. Like a fool I hung around the black clubs in town and got my chest slashed with a pruning knife. I made friends with low-life characters who sniffed anything from carpet cleaner to nail varnish.

I moved into a freezing flat with ice on the inside of the windows in winter. I did wild things like practising my drums six hours a day and making treacle toffee at three in the morning.

Once at a party I met a girl and her arthritic boyfriend. His joints ground audibly as he moved. They shared his pain and lived in their own private world.

For a while I worked as a zero operator at a telephone company. An irate mother asked me to interrupt a call on her line. I listened a few minutes before I broke in. Her tearful daughter was talking to her boyfriend in Texas. There were long transatlantic silences then they would start their apologies again.

I took it into my head to stop talking to people and became an emotional isolate.

In that hot summer the crops failed, wooden fences cracked and I fell off my bicycle when the roads melted.

I became the confidant of two unconventional young women. One reminded me of Isadora Duncan's picture in a book I had. The other dressed like a little girl in rah-rah skirts and blouses with round collars. I listened attentively and with compassion to their problems, thinking all the while how pleasurable it would be to fuck them. They drifted away as people do, then I heard that the scarf girl had tried to gas herself. Her damaged brain traced out its faint activity in the blue light of a hospital oscilloscope. The first Christmas her life support machine was decorated with blue and green tinsel then her parents asked for the power to be switched off.

At a late age I discovered masturbation and lost interest in personal relationships completely.

I worked at a nightclub and watched the world go by. I dodged fists and beer-bottles, witnessed a bouncer club a patron unconscious with a sawn-off broomhandle and suffered a thirty per-cent hearing loss.

I got into rocks. A refrigerator blew up in my face when I tried to take the motor out. I wanted it for a rock tumbling machine.

I read Nevil Shute, John Steinbeck and a lot of weird stuff I picked from the library at random.

I lived with a prematurely aged office clerk called Rupert. He told me his father was the world expert on bees. Rupert was batted around by everybody but accepted it as his lot and in the evenings would expound upon Schopenhauer and Freud.

Britain joined the Common Market and inflation rose. On TV I watched reports on the Arab-Israeli war and the oil crisis. I was disquieted by sea birds blackened with oil from the ruptured Amoco-Cadiz. Harold Wilson resigned and people began to worry about the times ahead.

I went on the last conducted tour of Battersea power station before they shut off the generators for good.

I became friends with a quasi-Buddhist. He would come home from work and toast a whole loaf of bread and fill the house with smoke. In my accident-prone car he refused to wear a seat belt. One night I decided I had stood enough of his nonsense and kicked him out.

My sister wrote a large sprawling novel and I lost the manuscript on the five-twenty train to Ealing Broadway. I told her and she punched me so hard my glasses broke in four places.

I attempted to reform my unsavory habits, cracked under the strain and acquired some new ones.

I too used to think that someday I would write a fictional account of my stupid life in the seventies.

I woke up one morning to find our dog lying in the gutter with its brains dashed over the road. My father twisted his face, heaved his chest and I realized he was crying.

A man in a white suit called round one evening to go nightclubbing. I was busy wetstoning a lump of serpentine and told him to go sling his hook. He said he was John Travolta.

For a few weeks at the time when a knowledge of only three chords could bring stardom I played terrible drums in a hardcore punk combo.

I broke some fingers punching a wall, forgot my dream of becoming the next Max Roach and enrolled at college to be made into a standardized person.

On the advice of a person named Milo I cancelled my subscription to Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

The red and black face returned.

I formed an arrangement with a girl. Both disillusioned with personal relationships but mindful of appearances I became her escort at company functions and she came along to maintain the appearance of normality at my more modest engagements.

I discovered too late that I had forgotten how to communicate with people.

For some crazy reason I joined the Samaritans and spent two evenings a month trying to talk lonely, desperate callers out of suicide. I stuck it for two months then gave up when I heard an older more experienced counsellor pleading with a voice on the end of the line: "Your poor tabby Sammy, think how lonely he'll be when you're gone. Be a luv and put the pills away". She did. I let it get to me. After that I hung around with a manic depressive, became depressed, tried psychiatry, hypnotherapy and was prescribed various drugs which had no effect. Then Russia invaded Afghanistan and Margaret Thatcher was elected. That was the end of the Seventies.

DALE

1. Henri Matisse

Dale first met Kelly behind the Iron Curtain. It happened three months after the separate times they had stood in front of the notice board at the Slade School of Art and been separately convinced that they should take this once in a lifetime opportunity to visit the art treasures of Leningrad. The notice must have been translated from Russian thought Dale. Art treasures may be preserved but cannot be 'preserving', despite what the poster said. Kelly's eye didn't get that far but stopped at 'three nights free room and board courtesy of the Board for Intercultural Exchange'.

Three months later and Dale sat amidst the art treasures. She jingled the silver hearts on her antique charm bracelet and stared at nothing much. An underground fashion magazine had once written of her 'eclectic tomboy taste' and as she slumped there among the Matisses of The Hermitage, as out of place as Zandra Rhodes twirling a nine-inch bamboo cigarette holder at a truckers' stop, the drab connoisseurs eyed the girl furtively, some of them looking to see if there were an exhibit number for her in the catalogue.

Dale removed a large man's pocket watch from the side pocket in her floral man's vest. The watch didn't work. It didn't tick but crunched as the broken parts were disturbed. Dale wore the watch for effect just like the man's grey suit from a thrift store which she had customised by arranging a frothy paisley scarf in the breast pocket and

above it a kitschy heart-shaped brooch with a little picture of Clark Gable in its square centre. The effect, to quote the magazine, was 'offbeat and disarming, with a quirky charm'; here, in Leningrad, she was just a pale girl lacking taste; wearing clothes from a hundred different polluted Western wardrobes; probably a schizophrenic.

The air conditioning played a constant A flat; played a steady stream of preserving air across the red Muses painted playing on a hilltop; across the painted pinks and blues of the empty artist's studio and the exotic views and faces pasted against the gallery wall. The pictures would not change much over time. In a controlled environment the deterioration of the oils would be so slight that only special equipment could detect it.

- Are you bored with all this? Dale asked finally.

As she jangled the hearts on her charm bracelet she had noticed a probable English art-school androgynite stuck in front of a portrait blocked out in yellow, blue and green. Kelly, for Kelly it was, had been rooted there for ten minutes. Dale didn't know this; they had arrived separately. All she saw was a girlish boy or then again a boyish girl like herself, slouching in a disreputable fish-tail parka, probably going through a no-concessions-to-fashion phase. Over Kelly's long hair was tied a gypsy black scarf dotted with silver daggers, a disastrous addition, thought Dale, that made the clash with the red-striped ex-Salvation Army trousers poking out from the ratty jacket, almost cataclysmic. She fiddled with her bracelet some more.

Dale had forgotten about Kelly when, intent on the gelled lustre of the floorboards, she had trodden on his foot, back again at the 'portrait in green, yellow and blue'.

- Are you bored with all this? she said now, recovering herself.

- What? said Kelly, moving out of the light and into the shadow; trying to hide the nervous eczema that had sprung up overnight on his face.

- Does it not feel as if Matisse were entombed not displayed in here? said Dale.

(Blimey, where's she from? thought Kelly.)

- No, but you know what I mean, she continued. It's as if time had stopped for Matisse, yet at the expense of its being speeded up for us. I feel old in here.

(I know. A refugee from that Ken Russell film *Women in Love*.)

- Yes, it does have a sort of naphness, said Kelly. I've always lusted after this portrait though. Lydia Delectorskaya. The composition's just marvey, the way her face seems enframed by dense greenery.

(Oh no, thought Dale, this one's serious.)

- I love his late period, when he'd got it all sussed.

- I don't know, said Dale. Do you feel as if he were totally sure?

- Well yes, said Kelly. He was a weird bugger but by 1947 he was pretty much on the case. You know, on the ball. In control of his medium and all of that old cack.

(A weird bugger?)

Dale looked into the frame without expression, at what once might have been a living Lydia Delectorskaya. Kelly looked away to one side, at the girl's psychedelic scarf then at her profile. He had already noticed her peculiar blankness and thought about an uncle who had died from Parkinson's Disease. The old man had suffered progressive paralysis until, stuck in his straight-backed chair waiting to die, he looked like a sagging disregarded puppet.

Quick as a thought, or a deja vu flash, or the last piece of a jigsaw clicking home, the reflection of Dale's expressionless face slipped across the glass over the constant, unfathomable green, blue, yellow of Matisse's Lydia.

- Look at that asymmetry, said Kelly. The way he enclosed the face, the flickers of Renaissance portraiture. He was a boy all right.

- Do I look old? said Dale.

- What? said Kelly.

- My face has terrible lines when I laugh or frown. I try not to. I want to be Lydia.

(I thought so. Two bricks short of a full load.)

- Do I look old? she asked again.

- No, you still look pretty youthful to me.

- Still?

That plaintive 'still' finished it. They drifted separately around the gallery in the opposite direction to the one that had brought them together. That Time. Behind the Iron Curtain.

2. <u>Cecil B. DeMille`a Go-go.</u>

Against a grey trashbag sky, Big Ben jumps the final step to the hour. Boing! 'The leaden circles dissolved in the air'. Etc.

Bump! A door slams somewhere. With its large windows the red-brick building is official. From the side a notice slides into view: 'Slade School of Art'.

Framed by the closed door a fashionably funky girl walks away from the portico with a large black portfolio under her arm

Her face betrays nothing. In the girl's eyes maybe a flicker of determination.

Over the flipping pages of a calendar falls the swing of a pendulum.

From the classroom clock down to the girl sitting upright in the front row of desks. She rules a line under 'blood pressure' in her red notebook. Behind, blurred blue are a mass of bending figures.

Boing! The class dismisses.

Workers bustle home over Westminster bridge. Ting! A red bus pulls to a halt and a bag lady fumbles out and stumps off like a crotchety owl. The murky river runs beneath mixing its exotic effluents.

Brring! From behind a hazed blue shoulder blue uniforms stream out of the door. With a bang, the door shuts. Rows of gnarled desks, then in the far corner a head of straggly hair jolts upward as the notebook tips over the edge and bellyflops onto the floor like a dead red bird.

Up the graffitied corridor a pockmarked red door. The handle; the keyhole. Muffled then louder, louder come the stertorous gasps of someone crying.

Boing! Blurred faces peer out of misted windshields on Westminster bridge. A misfiring car hiccoughs past the eye as the rain streams down and the river churns a few paper cups around two bedraggled ducks beneath.

Through a rainsweated window sits the girl gorging herself on a factory cake at a dirty brown table.

The orange of the street light outside flicks on and is splintered through the raindrops clinging to the glass. Outside a car door clunks shut.

It is 2pm by the humming pink clock. In a dressing gown the girl's body spasms as she vomits into a large white sink.

Dale? A door bangs. 'Come home love. The river runs. We'll look after you. Blue uniforms recede down a corridor. We worry. Bang! We. Boing! Home.

A large period house against a skylark sky. The girl toils up a long gravelled drive and joins the two figures framed by the doorway. The woman puts her arm around the fragile girl. They go in and the door slams shut.

3. Plagiarism

i

- I suppose this is goodbye as they say, said Dale pulling her grey suit close as the train hove into sight, tingling the grey steel rails that stretched into the blurry fog.

- What? said Kelly. Yes. Try ringing when I get back to London. I'm not in much though. Pity we're on separate trains. What are you going to do?

- Oh, I'm finished with this artistic charade.

She got into the carriage and clunked the clumsy door shut.

- I came to Leningrad to revive my enthusiasm, but it didn't work. My future is very mixed up, but I want to do something idealistic.

As the train graunched away Kelly waved at the vacant face, the eyes apparently trained on the skeletal wooden frame of a rusting goods wagon.

ii

So out the lights flick all over the various chambers of the gallery; bury the scuffs on the waxed floor, the indecipherable notices, the, what shall we say, the public face of the building in a downpour of preserving darkness. Clunk goes the last door and the silence hums as a fumbling wreath of cigar smoke wafts beneath; twists in a corkscrew and wraps its tendrils around what was Lydia Delectorskaya, now a dark grey window, but into where? The past? A world of faces petrified in attitudes of wonder, of disappointment, of irony?

(Kelly boarded the train and decided on a safe place to sit, away from the man with half a beard.)

iii

But, what after all is one day? Winter brings rain and hail that tap exasperatingly on the high windows of the gallery. With spring and summer come annoying patches of light that, despite the special design of the building, play upon the canvasses and must be shut out with a complex array of blinds. "It's the lookers blast 'em", thought Erica, a junior curator, "that ruins this job, wearin' everything out with their arrogant manners". Erica limped (for the special shoe for her bad leg hadn't come from the hospital yet) through the calm, empty gallery whistling a tune (she had once been a promising violinist) as she

flashed her electric torch from side to side, here picking up the straight black bar of Lydia's nose, there the almond eyes of a gentleman dressed in a deckchair-striped sarong. Fragments, all fragments; held suspended in a whirling mixture that evaded the perfect whole.

(Near Riga, Dale caused consternation by sitting in the corridor outside the compartment. The dry air inside, she was sure, cracked her skin.)

iv

Time Passes. Through winter sun and summer rain Erica whistles her tune, now stumping (they had made the shoe too high) between the galleries. The flashing light from the beacon on the opposite building beats red through the high windows and at night picks out the swaying mantle of the sidewinding smoke from the commissioner's cigar as it sidles through the legs of brass sculptures and up into the gloom.

(After art college, Dale took a job against everyone's advice but it didn't work out. She sits at home and thinks and stares out of the window and occasionally may think about Kelly.)

v

The gruelling month of April comes round again and hurls seed pods like locusts through the open door. One lands on Erica's practical black boot. Blast 'em, blast 'em. Bang! She shuts the wind out.

4. The Closedown Dash

Phweeeeeeeeeeeeee-

Blurgh. Who's sitting on the remote?
Time for bed honey.

5. The Mechanical Method

Tick-a-tock-a-tick-a-tock-a-tick-a-tock-a-tick-a-tock-a-tick-a-tock-a-tick-a-tock-a-tick

6. London Calling

Some Time later and Kelly is almost out of the picture. Dale slipped out of the story for a while too, exchanged her strenuously non-coordinating thriftshop knick-knacks for a nurse's uniform; failed her exams; went down with bulimia; went off the rails and was found by a friend almost half-dead in a Wandsworth bedsit. Dale's rich parents took her home to their Northumberland farm to recuperate far away from the racing pace of the big city but got sick of their daughter's mooning around, found her a job and gave her the money to get back.

7. The Circle Line

Had a certain stout director of silent films stood in this underground train compartment, arms akimbo in his shiny suit, he may have conceived of the montage technique. Cutting through central London, from Notting Hill Gate to Liverpool Street, from Edgeware Road to Blackfriars and back again, the stations which flash between the black tunnels of the Circle Line write everything there is to know about London in little over half an hour.

If the Mercedes is on the ramp, then the Money disembark at either Sloane Square or, if they are travelling north, Kings Cross. Oiks, UB40s, non-specific marginal types and ruffians are herded off at Liverpool Street to await the connecting Central Line which will rattle them away to the halcyon region in the east. Snaresbrook, Fairlop, Barkingside and Grange Hill.

Defenestrate your copies of *I.D.* and *The Face*; the Underground is the natural habitat of the subculture. Run the Circle Line round and you will find a bewildering diaspora of geriatric hep cats; Boxheads; B-Boys; Nerds; Skinheads; Suedeheads; neo-lampshades; young women dressed in courgettes and pre-stressed concrete boaters; antique Punks; pratts; quasi-post-New Romantics; Holly Johnson look-a-likes; Madonna clones; proto-Mods; Goths down from the North; Rude Boys; Crude Boys and crypto-yuppie-hippies.

You don't need to travel at 286,000 miles per second to rupture the space-time continuum. It can be accomplished here at a noisy sixty-five miles per hour. This is a journey without tenses. Buy a ticket and ride the montage all day.

8. *I have known many so-called screen goddesses*

Like the flipping channels of a TV, over Dale's eyes whip the fluorescent stations of the Circle Line. Figures and billboards accelerate past for the third time flickering her eyelashes which like the gate of a movie projector split the flashing scene into frames. In some part of her brain the footage rewinds. It is the snaking cables strapped to the tunnel walls that run not backwards but forwards behind her blank face; a clever trick that despite a feeling of nausea can seem to make the train suck down the tube in reverse.

Intense, Dale adjusts as the train barrels forward into High Street Kensington, rolls a barrel of air platformwards that prinks the punks' hair and crackles biodegradable Harrods bags. Her trusty man's watch, her comforter, her blue blanket, always stalled in the rush hour at ten to five, rattles as she rushes the stairs and scrambles for work.

Her parents found Dale this 'job', if it can be called such. For six hours a day she looks after Maudy. Maudy is by all accounts a character. Still spry at 94 she refuses to put her teeth in until three in the afternoon; potters around all day in a silver chiffon dressing gown; tosses fig stones on the floor and cackles as she improvises the dialogue for the silent films she watches on the video. Maudy doesn't really need looking after. Her past she finds easy to remember; it works a little better however with two.

9. *Though most of them were alley cats*

The paint of the blue wooden wall is sticky under the Hollywood sun as the yellow and green bug climbs its way up to nowhere, rattling its wing covers now and then.

- Of course Maud, he can't resist. Don't forget to do that stuff with your eyes.

- Yes mother.

Maud is not intimidated by the vast blue of the MGM building, nor by the screen test, not even by King Vidor. He will like her. Most men do. She lights up a cigarette, rolls her eyes and tries some preparatory pouting. Everything in order. A bell rings somewhere. Maud slips off her grey slingback, reaches up with it and crunches the insect dead. Dark in the wall, the blue door of Studio Two swings open and Maud goes in.

10. *Sarah Bernhardt was my darling*

Of course, as her vaudeville mother predicted, Maud made the grade. Vidor tried her out in *The Miracle Man*, then Henry King gave her second lead in *Are Parents People?* After a year or so Lon Chaney fell for Maud and it was then that Howard Hawks got his claws into her and gave her a part in *A Girl in Every Port*. Maud became a silent star. For a while she caught Valentino's eye then worked her way through Glen Tryon, Lars Hanson, James Murray and Marion Davies.

Glittering mad parties were thrown. Maud would arrive with Sarah Berhardt, Clara Bow or Betty Bronson and dance and drink highballs then drive around with square-shouldered men until the car fell in a ditch and they would have to walk home. The grease paint was always there to conceal the damage; to simplify complex skin tones for the benefit of the crude celluloid emulsion.

She knew it wouldn't last and in 1932, on her mother's advice, took the precaution of marrying Sidney Franklin the director, a rich man she didn't love. Maud set a trend and soon they were all doing it.

11. *She was always terribly afraid of growing old*

Dale came into the room and the door clacked shut.

- Ah, Dale my dear, said Maudy. Let me look. Yes, you are certainly a picture today. It's ten-thirty. Why don't you let me give you that nice watch I've got? What's wrong with your face? You've painted it. Looks most unnatural.

- This place is a mess, said Dale. You've put your teeth in?

- How unglamorous you are. Dale? I believe you remind me of Sarah Bernhardt, a very great friend of mine. She was desperately afraid of growing old. I last saw her in '53 and I'll swear she must've plastered the paint on with a trowel. I said, 'Sare, you look just awful'. She wasn't offended, we were good, good friends. I told her though, I said 'the clock don't stop running for nobody'. She died a few months later of some woman's complaint. Fancy a fig? Yes, I've put my dentures in, I'm expecting a visitor.

All over the room, plastered on the wall, on sideboards, on cabinets were movie stills, photographs, some of them signed with flamboyant, unstable flourishes. Box-jawed heroes slanted themselves into their frames whilst out of a soft-focus fog the vamps smouldered away.

- Who's that? said Dale, pointing at one of the stills.

- Oh, that's me in *Why Change Your Wife?* said Maudy. Aren't I beautiful don't you think? And next to it that's me with Gloria Swanson and Lillian Gish. We used to call her 'pookie' but I couldn't tell you why.

- I'll go and mop the kitchen, said Dale.

- Stay and talk for a while, said Maudy. Did you ever see me in *The Petrified Forest* ? It was my last and best. By 1936 I'd had enough but I couldn't turn down the chance of working with Leslie Howard and Bette Davis. Didn't know what to make of Bogart. He was not very tall you know. Strange movie. The hero lets himself be killed. Am I boring you Dale? You left this yesterday.

Maudy fished out a pink tub of cream.

- What is it?

- Stuff for my face, said Dale. It's vitamin E cream with a collagen stabiliser.

- Means nothing to me. You really do look most unnatural, like you belong in a picture frame from some snotty art gallery. Just like Sarah, bless her. Look, forget about preserving yourself my dear and enjoy life. Run and jump and chase men. What's happened to whatisname?

- Nothing.

(Lydia Lydia Lydia Lydia Lydia)

- Ah, men are all the same, said Maudy. In my day I was something of a go-getter. Hard-nosed like Mary Pickford, but after four marriages you've had enough.

Men and their damn winkles. Life is just a circle, you get born, you go up, then you go down, then you die. Pretty stupid. Do you see that picture there?

Maudy pointed to the photograph on the TV.

-That's me with the pianist Eubie Blake. Do you know what he said a month before he died? ' If I'd've known I was goin' to live this long I'd've taken better care of myself'. He was 103, bless him. See that big picture above? Marie Prevost. A bitch and a tramp. Did I ever tell you her story?

The door eased to as Dale clattered around in the kitchen. Remote control in hand, Maudy settled herself down as the titles flashed up for *The Petrified Forest* .

12. *Her greatest triumph was* Queen Elizabeth

The blue tea service rattled as Dale clunked the kitchen door behind her.

- Ah, my treasure, said Maudy. You've rubbed your makeup off. Look what it's done to your skin. It's all blotchy. We're up to a good part. Bogart kept forgetting his lines and Archie, that's the director, made us reshoot it fifteen times. You should've heard Davis carry on. Look at me, I'm nearly forty in this movie but I don't look a day over twenty. Time has been kind to me which is more than I can say for Sarah. She started to go downhill after *Queen Elizabeth,* poor thing. A boring film if you ask me. I've watched this one hundreds of times though and I never get tired of it, never get sick of looking at myself. That's why I'm so young today. What do you think Dale darling? Is that a scar on your cheek? No? Have you seen that film with Bob and Bing, Hope and Crosby I mean? The one where Bing runs off with the girl and 'The End' rolls down and Bobby tries to push it back up and win her for himself. Well, it don't work in real life so enjoy it while you can luvvy. I'll tell you that story later.

13. *Of which she was heard to remark*

After *The Petrified Forest* Maudy snoozed. Dale clicked off the TV and went into the bathroom to reapply her makeup.

Bruised her face looked as Dale shaded on blue, yellow and green, then blended them with her fingers, trying to compose herself; unfathomable as she stared out of the mirror, framed by the flaking gilt surround.

Maudy called from the other room.

- Oh, your face, she said. It looks like a piece of rotten cheese. Still, there's no accounting for taste. Have I told you about Marie Prevost? I don't think I have.

She was the winner who became the doggie's dinner

Well, things went a little awry for poor Marie. She was a bitch and a no-good alcoholic and it's quite a hoot really. Anyway, she cracked up and MGM kicked her out, quite rightly because she looked like an old buzzard. Her husband left her and she had to give up the place at Sternwood Heights, that's the expensivest area in Hollywood, very select, and take a smaller place in Beverly Hills. By the fifties her films were a joke and she took to hiding herself away; hiding herself away and drinking, drinking, drinking. Fancy a fig? By the sixties she was invisible, no one called, everybody ignored her. The only person, or thing I should say, she talked to was Ricki her dog. Anyway, in June '65 the neighbours called the police in, that dumb schnauzer was yelping and making a nuisance of himself. The cops bust the door down and what'd'you think they found? Blood everywhere but no Marie Prevost. That damn dog had eaten her. That's what you get for vanity. Can't you do something about your face luvvy?

14. "*This is my one chance of immortality*"

The clock don't stop running for nobody.

Wardrobe - Courtesy of Winona Ryder, Vogue Magazine, June 1989, and Mark X of the 'Juicy Cocks', Fad (San Francisco), lucky no.13, April 1989.

Camera - Bela Balazs, Theory of the Film

Best Boy - Binkie Black

The clock don't stop running for nobody.

Discontinuity - Virginia ('Skeeter') Woolf

Lighting - David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film

Gaffer - Methuselah Molotov

The clock don't stop running for nobody.

Special Effects - Lee R. Bobker, Elements of Film

IN EVERY DREAMHOME

She is leaving the Dreamhome. The Dreamhome is something quite other than a dreamhome or the dream home. Sleeping and waking she has been plagued by oppressive thoughts and visions; her life, she feels, has been tainted and now she must leave the Dreamhome. She does not understand things and will not try. She simply must go. The rain drips from her holdall and into the crunching gravel as she walks away.

But why the Dreamhome? Are there walls painted in apricot flush and decorated with white coving sculpted in bubbles at the corners? Like shaving foam sitting in the palm of a hand? Does the Dreamhome furnish every kind of modern comfort? Soft, concealed lighting? A careful selection of rare Janice Martin records? Has she always resided here or is this just the last in a series of Dreamhomes? Is there a private bathroom for her convenience with a sunken whirlpool and *en suite* exercise room? Complete with a Nautilus multigym? When will her mother and father return to the Dreamhome? They are at a party? Can their absence be connected with her departure? Is it the case that as a child she drove around the grounds in a vintage Lotus motor-car? And flattened the daffodils? Her father is successful? A business executive? Is there coldness between them in the Dreamhome?

A HEARTACHE.

She will go to a cafe, drink an espresso and wait for the bus. Her life has been tainted. Something about the Dreamhome. A woman sits in an armchair somewhere in the back of her head but will not tell. The pieces will not mesh. She has remembered these pieces so much that she is not sure if they are memories any longer. They beat the present into a dream and invade every moment with their twisted fictions.

She is wealthy. Answers cannot be bought. Psychiatrists with expensive modern artworks in their waiting rooms dispensed pills to help her sleep. After a month she decided hypnotherapists were quacks. The faithhealer took thirty pounds and left her with more questions. There seems one option left but she must wait until the slur this will bring to the family name stops mattering. In the cafe, rain drips intermittently from the window frame like sweat from an opera singer's brow.

Is it possible she was born like this? She cannot remember a time when things were different. At school she is a high achiever but this does not get her friends. She has few. Her experience with men is practically nil and she worries that given time she may become a pervert. The black treacle of her coffee has gone cold. A male laugh bursts through with the swing of the kitchen door. There were men once, a few, but they shied away. One told her she was like an albatross. He was tall and slender. Sometimes the world seems very far away, as if she were observing it two-dimensionally, through cameras sunk in her eyes. She suffers panic attacks and must touch things to reassure herself. It is at these times that she feels as if she were barely hanging on to the world.

The facts, if they can be called such, are these. Always the same incidents, real, dreamed or imagined that drive her into a corner in her mind. She has repeated them hundreds of times, to herself and to professionals. Something to do with the Dreamhome. None of the answers make sense. These things run in her mind like the downpulling undertow beneath the quiescent surface of a millpond.

The end of the pink asphalt runway was clearly visible from the bay window in the side of the house. Everything about the holiday cottage was large. She was eight or nine years old. In the window seat the white grid of its frame made her think of the greenhouse at home. Sometimes, to frighten herself, she would look out through half-closed eyes and turn the darkened wood into the black veins of an enormous insect's wing.

The cottage was called "Cedar Haven". It was built partly of wood that oozed sap from its knots. This is secondary. It is the aerodrome that still flies planes through her

mind. Her younger brother would sleep on the bottom bunk. She loves her brother. In the purple morning dusk the sound of aeroplanes warming their engines would wake her. She cannot forget this. It has attached itself to, become the soundtrack for her other disjointed memories; these ones retrieved without shouts, voices or motion. The whining engines would continue for hours. By dawn the radar would be on, sweeping over the TV and FM; grating away at the signals. They would have to be turned off. She rarely saw the planes since they took off away from the cottage. Once in the evening, when she would wait for the forest of navigation lights to come on in front of the runway, a green and beige one soared in low, lifting the long grass erect with the suction from beneath its wings.

Shortly before winter came it was Open Day and they drove through the aerodrome gates. The gun ports of the Spitfire parked near the entrance were sealed with corks. It was the first time she had seen the plane up close. She took photographs of the silver fighters on the tarmac and her father standing in front of the radar mast with its rotating red antenna on the top. Around the airfield were dumped untidy piles of finely ground coal.

These things do not come to her like this. As the aeroplanes whine, the "Cedar Haven", the radar mast, her fear, the green navigation lights, will not hold still but flip, nudge around, tying tight a knot inside her head. Who is it that opens the door and switches on the lights back at the Dreamhome?

Other things come between. The trees are purple in the evening light. On the ground beneath are rotting ferns. They smell like spit rubbed into the palm of her hand. Brother and sister have been fighting the MacDonald boys for scrumping apples in their orchard. The boys are older. She has run away. The elder boy pins her brother's arms to the ground and cuffs him; he struggles and gets kicked in the face. She watches this from the denser trees but does not help. He is bleeding but she will not move. Now she is the only one in the cafe and the waiters fidget for her to go. Her brother comes through the trees holding a handkerchief to his nose. It is embroidered in the corner with 'Friday'. She loves him. He pushes her away. Something about the Dreamhome.

The woman in the back of her head crosses her legs and sinks deeper in the armchair. Against the sound of the engines she watches the ceiling turn from grey to white. The radar mast stretches up as her father stands in a grey suit flapped by the breeze. She hears her brother below turn over in his sleep. He leaves her in the trees. Each of these things is a twist in a knot that will not let itself be undone. The cafe tables are being wiped over ready for the morning.

The others come between. She is lost in the fog that covers the playing field. It is dark and she is lost. She has bunked school and spent the day kicking around the long grass at the edge of the field, uncertain whether to go home. An electricity pylon reaches up into the fog. Its widely spread legs leak rusty blood into the concrete base. The brown insulators above are almost scratched out in the gloom but she can hear them crackling in the moisture like cooking eggs. The pylon could almost walk; standing there it is a giant with his hands in his pockets. She blunders in a panic into the grey. In the cafe the overhead fans are being switched off. Their stirring shadows are not like shoals of fish anymore as they stop whirling around the walls.

Is there a man standing in her room? Have her parents returned to the Dreamhome to find a note tacked to their daughter's door? Written in green biro on a page torn from an exercise book? Does the man know the answers? Does he make sure he leaves the light on before he looks at the empty bed? Is it the case that the father's face creases with composure when his wife comes into the room? Her party dress needs unhooking? Does he look away into the hall as he turns the light out?

Something about the Dreamhome. The woman in the armchair crosses her legs and shrugs the shoulders of her jacket into place. White is showing through the half inch of coffee in her cup. Her bedroom is dark. She senses the man standing by her bed and starts out of sleep. A small girl, the man blocks out the crack of light from the door and looks down at her from the gloom. Standing there tall, his face is not that of a father. But this is not the key or if it is then the lock is broken. She stands outside the cafe. The rain has stopped. A bus pulls up but it will not take her to where she is going.

A BEAUTIFUL STORY FOR UGLY CHILDREN

> Mortified, she made as if to rise, then struck a wistful
> chord in silence - an indolent husband, a neglected wife.
> - Ronald Firbank The New Rythum

The gentle breeze so dry, wagged a balcony door then tickling the sore throats of yellow and pink lupins gaping in window boxes rocked the hanging pots of bergamot. As the notes of the diminished chord sprung apart and faded, somewhere down the hall a bell started ringing. Marion Gordon, folded orchid-like in the blue breath of her *mousseline*

day-gown pushed a half-smoked cheroot into the picked-at remnants of her snack, a gooseberry fool, then recrossed her legs. Torpidly flung on the crepe de Chine couch she allowed her eyes to wander over the more interesting features of Mercury, a statuette blotched with sun patches flung through the open balcony. There was a chip in one buttock. The uncontrollable proclivities of Marion Gordon were extreme even by the standards of Hollywood. New York, however was where she liked to 'recuperate'.

Freddy her Chihuahua gnawed at her toe.

- So droll! she exclaimed aloud.

Behind a door opened discreetly and into the room came a softly grinning boy dressed in a white immaculate uniform.

- It's quite safe, Marion Gordon trilled. Admiral Teach is away for the afternoon, so you wont be bullied. Can you do something for me Chokey?

He nodded.

- Always *such* a shy boy, she shimmered ethereally. Say Chokey-Choke, why don't you call me Maud? Will you?

He nodded.

- Oh dear, we're not getting very far are we? Be a sweet and pick up those things. I felt all mazy this morning and *had* to fling them off. I'm really *quite* ill you know.

The boy picked up her trinkets and as he did so Marion Gordon allowed her appraising eye to stray over his obeisant form. She recrossed her legs.

- Goodness, how brutish you're getting. Your uniform looks ready to spring apart at the seams. The Admiral is out at a private function tomorrow, the dear. Bring a tape measure and I'll get your size. Tailors are so vulgar aren' t they?

The bell continued to ring.

- My agent hasn't phoned, Chokey? No? Claude, the old slyboots, abandoning me like this. What *long* legs!

With rare self-control, some might say, she returned her attentions to Freddy, now scrimmaging amongst the jerking heads of purple candytuft.

- Alfredo! Fredders, my little flittermouse, come to your mistress. Yes, *such* obedience, better than rotten Chokey-Choke.

From downstairs came a solicitous tap-tapping.

- Oh gosh, Chokes! It's Mrs Waite. I'd clean forgotten. Put my salamander brooch somewhere safe will you otherwise she'll be off with it.

Again came the tappety-tap, this time a little more softly as if discouraged.

- Quick, let her in. Vamoose, vamoose! This *will* be a trial. The pest wants me to float her name before Claude, but she, poor thing, is simply not a candidate for the screen. Her husband is a dear though. *Such* nice teeth!

For lack of any other space amongst the beflowered clutter, Chokey slipped the brooch onto the plinth on which Mercury stood and left Marion Gordon, she of the famous walk and plastic pout, to her private meditations. As she crisply matched another cheroot, Freddy appeared among the heliotropes, several dismembered blooms between his pointed small teeth.

A silver single tear trilled down her marble cheek and dropped onto her gown making a spot of deepest blue.

- Oh Freddy. How did I come to marry such a klutz? she brokenly fluted. Admiral Teach has been a *great* disappointment all round, she continued, sliding her dove grey eyes once again over the bemuscled statuette wallowing in the cheerful sunlight.

Euphemia Waite stood waiting in the doorway. Yip-yapping, Freddy snapped at her ankles. Marion Gordon rose luxuriously from the couch and with a well rehearsed manoeuvre, one that had caused many many a strong man's downfall, stood with her back to the bright balcony, her skin tawny, her gown transparent blue tumbled over with effulgent amber tresses.

- Freddy, come here you horrid barbarian! Why Euphey, how *nice* and so *chic* too. What an amusing dress, and sapphires, how *deliciously* extravagant!

- Thank you, Euphemia replied, reeling from the cloyingness into which she had entered.

Marion Gordon crossed the room.

- I'm afraid I feel an itty-bit squiffy Euph, so you musn't stay long. What an inconvenience I am, she purred. May I fix you a vermouth?

Euphemia, like Chokey, simply nodded. Maud, for Marion Gordon was a screen name, tinkled the decanters and as she did so Euphemia allowed her wounded eyes to trace the beloved shape of the actress shadowed through an oh-so-tantalising shroud of softest sheerest blue.

- Admiral Teach is away again, ventured Maud, breaking a silence into which the ever-ringing bell had strayed. So you find me all alone, that is apart from Chokey, but the boy is proving *so* troublesome. How is your husband Cyril, the sweet?

Euphemia gazed directly, breathlessly into the dove grey eyes.

- Oh, the same as ever. (She had started to tremble.) He's planning a jaunt out to the Arctic, something about sperm whales and king penguins. I hardly see him to be honest. I usually learn of his whereabouts from the society columns.

- *Really*? How *interesting*, Maud replied, brightening as she recollected the mad afternoon when Mercury's buttock had got chipped. You must invite him over very soon. Allow me to assess the situation.

Abandoning herself again to the couch, she petted Freddy. Euphemia unsteadily rocked at the prospect of the warm half-somnolent form before her.

- Did you, perhaps, if you had time?

Maud tickled Freddy's chin. His eyes bulged.

- Mm, yes, Maud carelessly fluted. I mentioned you to my agent only last week. He seemed excited, the dear and *promised* to find you something.

She yawned, between teeth of pearly white and wet, soft lips aflame.

- Now Euphey dear. I know I'm awful but drink up. I do feel *most* peculiar. Chokey will show you out.

Dancing through the room again, the wind lifted a cocktail of smothering scents from the frothing audience of blooms exotic as if to cover an unpleasant odour. Maud languished on the couch and crossed her legs.

- King penguins, she sighed, lost in some pleasure past or more probably future.

Chokey reappeared through the door.

- Ah, Chokey-Choke, my *naughty* boy. Check the fixtures, all of them. Who knows what that woman will pinch next. Give me my brooch.

Chokey, rejuvenated by a visit from a male friend of uncertain character, strode across the room to Mercury's pedestal, rolling his hips with a rare show of confidence. Indulging herself again, Maud ran an imaginary tape measure down his broadening back, an exercise she found exquisitely pleasurable. The brooch however was gone.

Kath. What a lot of foreigners there are about lately. I see one today. Playing the accordion. They live in a world of their own these people.

Kemp. Coloured?

Kath. No.

Kemp. I expect he was. They do come over here. Raping people.
It's a problem. Just come out o' jail had he?

- Joe Orton Entertaining Mr Sloane

LONDON

Dressed in a threadbare suit, a suspicious stain on one leg, walking to and fro outside a mews house of some gentility, the foreign gentleman whistled the closing bars of a light but memorable air.

Euphemia Waite neurotically paced from wall to wall in one of the rooms above. Rising early she had tidied the house in expectation of her guest, bought magazines, impossibly expensive flowers that made her nose twitch, and put out the doilies. It was now early afternoon and what with her frenzied, anxious cigarette smoking, the room had begun to look like the public bar in a tavern frequented by the uncouth hordes. She checked her pocket book for the fifteenth time: 'Marion Gordon (Maud) ten o'clock'.

Pinned to her slinky silk dress, a frivolous creation that she had had to borrow from a friend, was a skittering salamander brooch. Accidentally, Euphemia had picked it up when they were both in New York and how she wished Maud would call to collect it. Cyril, absent for two weeks now, Euphemia supposed or fondly imagined, was off on another expedition. This was what she told friends. Most of the time her husband's whereabouts were an utter mystery. She never had the foggiest when he would turn up, even had he been able to offer any comfort which in this case he could not.

Fifteen times she had telephoned Maud's palatial London house. That idiot boy Chokey had persisted in giving the same noncommital answer. No. Marion Gordon is away. She will return later. Now there was no reply and Euphemia guessed that the somewhat wayward Chokey had found a more important task to amuse himself with.

It was true that only a week ago Maud's first husband, the director Sidney Franklin, had met a rather premature and bizarre end. But Maud was one for neither sentimentality nor lasting affections. Euphemia had read about it in the *Telegraph*. Struck by lightning during a freak thunderstorm on the set of *Turko the Terrible*, he had gamely crawled to safety only to be trampled by a herd of crazed camels. The funeral as chance would have it was today.

Downstairs the doorbell chimed. Euphemia panicked, dabbed her cigarette out in a pot of borrowed camellias and, straightening her dress, whisking the pall of smoke away

as best she could, hid the now dog-eared magazine beneath the sofa. On the way to the door she hesitated and seemed to change her mind. She then removed Maud's silver lizard and frantically pinned it to the inside of one of Cyril's less rakish hats.

But it was not Maud. Euphemia faced a shabby sallow-skinned man of almost certain disreputability.

- Might this be the Waite residence? he enquired.

- Yes, but what of it? Euphemia replied. What is your business?

- Nice house. Fixtures is all your own? We was thinking of moving out here but the wife got taken ill like. The doctors said it was an interesting case. She got cited in a journal.

- That may well be, but I'm expecting an important guest.

- Fine wallpaper, a tribute to the British craftsman. I see some in Woolworths just like it. Five quid ten a roll.

- Go away you ra`gamuffin! Euphemia shrilled. I have no time for your alehouse fandango.

- Wait a minute lady. We likes to create an impression of affability before the client. Says so in the manual.

- What manual?

- Ah, that might best be left till we adjourn inside.

- Who said you're coming in? I've had quite enough of your idiocy.

- Let me put you wise on a matter of some urgency. Name's Crint. You'll find me highly respected in the firm. I've got plaques to prove it.

- Please take your foot from the door or I will be compelled to call a policeman.

- As you will lady. But they'll find me of sturdy character. I'm something fundamental in the Co-op. Ever heard of Russell Purcell and Company?

- No I have not. I let Mr Waite deal with the tradespeople. He is away cataloguing polar bears at the North Pole.

- I've devoted my life to the firm. Five years in luxury bedding, seven in kitchen furnishings, then I was summoned before Mr Seymour, that's the gaffer. He tipped me the wink and ever since then I've made the collection of unpaid accounts my calling.

(Pause.)

- Oh, you'd better come in, but take your boots off before you sully the Axminster.

Somewhere at the same time in the more rustic scenery of Basildon.

The strand of straw negligently sticking from the man's mouth describes a jittering and uncertain circle in the fresh rural air. Dressed in his bone-orchard-black suit and dark peaked cap this sombre figure, planted against a gate, contemplating the newly harvested field before him, looks incongruous, lost one might even say. He sneezes twice. Only the formaldehyde smell of the mortuary seems to cure his hay fever.

- Them toffee-nosed gits have fucked me up alright this time, he evenly reflects.

Back at 10 Gladiolus Mews. Crint and Euphemia Waite stand well apart in a room straining to be elegant. The flowers have wilted and an ashtray is overflowing onto the floor.

- Well, you see, that's how it is. No solution.

- But Mr Clint, sorry Crint. My husband made a substantial payment only last month.

- Ah, but it's not in our records. That's what we goes by see? 'E only put down the deposit and that was six months ago. My duties are clear. It's in the manual. Make an imbursation or I'm authorised to heave the pouffes and other gubbins back to the warehouse.

- Oh you brute! I am moved to make a complaint. I shall write to my MP.

- I'm safe. You'll find my record unimpeachable. I'll oblige you not to use the furniture in the meantime. The lads'll call round with the van tomorrow morning. (Pause.) In my line of work it's usual for the client to extend a small courtesy. A fiver would make a nice accommodation.

At the same time in Basildon, down one of its leafier lanes, a hearse is carelessly parked off the road in a clump of trees. The pink curtains are drawn. Faint but audible voices are heard from inside.

- Cyril, you Spartacus, bite me again. (Pause.) Harder!

(Moaning from inside hearse. Pause.)

- Maud darling. I abandoned my penguins for this. Couldn't you come up with anything better? We could have at least taken the Sidney out first.

- Oh, I *do* love a crowd though.

- But there's only room for one and the handles are playing the devil with my leg.

- Cyril, what a softie you are. There's plenty of room for two like *this*.

- If you say so. Where's the Admiral?

- Oh, *such* a bore. Inspecting some sea cadets I shouldn't wonder.

- Maud, peachy-weach. Think of Sidney. He will miss the ceremony.

- He's dead you poltroon. Here try this. (Pause.) No? Oh dear, how *ghastly* you are. No imagination. Still, I suppose you're right. The vicar will be waiting. We must find the chauffeur and pay him to keep mum about this. Affairs are so troublesome. Fasten me up squirrel. (Pause.) What's that pong?

- Embalming fluid I think.

- How *interesting*. Well, it's made my hair go all flat. Even death has failed to make Sidney more tolerable to live with. Come *on*.

> Helen. All right, you thought you knew it all before didn't you?
> But you came a cropper. Now it's "poor little Josephine,
> the tragedy queen, hasn't life been hard on her." Well,
> you fell down, you get up ... nobody else is going to carry
> you about.
>
> - Shelagh Delaney A Taste of Honey

Personal Effects

Yes, it's a bit of an inconvenience all round. Still, she did *give Cyril his marching orders and would* insist *on moving away. A bedsitting flat in* South *Chelsea I believe. How inelegant of her. They say she guzzled down the whole lot and if it hadn't of been for that awful woman from the Jehovah's Witnesses she'd've met her end. How* interesting

though. Maybe there's something in it after all. Do you know, they were forced to prize *that thing from her hand.* Gruesome *isn't it?*

Blue blouse (soiled); underwear (x 3); wristwatch (fancy); platinum wedding ring (loose); ornamental brooch (? lizard); 3/4 purple skirt (soiled); shoes (1).

We've resided here, that's me and the missus, for eleven year come last September. 'Cromwell Cuttings' isn't bad. People is nice, fresh air, British Legion just down the road a bit. I've been retired three month and two days now. Legs just gave out one afternoon. I was in debt collection, public relations we used to call it. A satisfying job. I misses the perks but the firm sees me right. Nice little pension, an allotment over the way there, day trip to Bournemouth every Summer, that sort of thing. Sometimes I feels a bit moody like but I tries to tell myself that I'm one of the lucky ones.

Carelessly daubed over with cheap, thick paint, Euphemia still jumps back at the blue electric crack which comes when she clunks these heavy switches in her flat of two rooms. Jerking on, the current slowly broils the old brown bakelite; sends into the quiet air a prickling odour that seeps into the curtains and inveigles itself into her bed.

It does no good thinking about it so I must try to stop. I will watch the young woman as she goes by at twelve. Probably on her lunch break. One day I will run out and ask her to have tea with me. But this place is so awfully shabby. She always seems to lengthen her stride when she gets here, as if anxious to hurry past. The hospital haven't called. I suppose they wouldn't. With one hand they reach for the stomach pump, whilst the other writes you off to abandonment.

Around the tap is wrapped a length of pale cloth. Water drip-drops, like a clock inevitably, as it cheats the leaking lock of brass and rubber, dives from the loose end into the deep end and pancakes onto the black blotched patches of the enamel sink.

When the wind blows this way the noise of trains sweeping through the cutting is unbearable. How quiet it was at the Mews. I read that she is back in America, being filmed with Davis and Bogart. Will she come back? Try to stop. Was it her I saw with that dark man in Oxford Street? She didn't recognize me.

A brown moth brokenly circles the white lighted ceiling globe, broadcasting deranged shadows across the walls. Nearer and nearer it ventures, slips inside, flutters its struggles over the room then is still.

The tea-cosy of yellow, pink and blue patchwork which Euphemia fitted onto the pot was, she remembered, a somewhat disappointing present for a wedding. She drank a lot of tea; it helped to pass the uneventful afternoons. It was all part of the rigmarole now: the tea-cosy around half past eleven; taking up her station in front of the window that looked out onto the road and behind it the drop of the cutting above which poked a clutter of signals. Sometimes she would watch them all day, cranking up to halt a train, dropping down with a squeak to let one pass.

No one in the old set would dare to venture across the river, certainly never to 'Cromwell Cuttings', with its wailing children and cabbage stalks tossed in the road. She had come here deliberately. South Chelsea, cutting and all, was preferable to the remote fringes of the in-crowd, to which, she was glad to see, Cyril continued to hang embarrassingly by the skin of his teeth.

Birds flew in all directions as a train charged through the cutting into the city. One day, Euphemia thought, I will have to clear those flies and things from inside the light.

She didn't walk past today. Maybe she has found a more pleasing route, or is lunching with a young gentleman, or has gone on holiday. I wonder where? The flat is clean; the tea is just right. One day she will come back. Stop.

ERIK FLUFFUMS STOP NEW YORK WONDROUS STOP SHOOTING IN TWO DAYS STOP MERCURYS OTHER STOP REMEMBER? STOP I CANT WAIT STOP MAUDY STOP

if murder requires a pointed instrument with a keen edge,
or simply of a certain weight, to assuage the murderer as
he slashes through some kind of other-worldly texture that
seems to be holding him captive, poison, it seems, cannot
bring a similar relief.

- Jean Genet Querelle of Brest

NEW YORK

Marion Gordon thought of her father at this moment. She must have been around eleven or twelve. It was at the Keys and her father, she had not yet started calling him Hugh, was looking out to sea in that moody way of his, while her mother fussed over her daughter's posture. 'Stand tall and look the world right in the eye', she had said. An old sourpuss was her father; he had left a few weeks before the Big Break.

Marion Gordon's face shivered with disgust as she stopped to remove a crushed flower stem stuck to her shoe. A street vendor had probably fainted. They were always doing it, those frowzy women dotted around Broadway, caterwauling, cheapening the place, breathing illegal liquor over all and sundry. Chrysanthemums, dahlias, daffodils scattered the sidewalk, littered it. Bruises. Bedroom eyes at midnight, now ashtrays in the early afternoon. Something unpleasant. Whatever.

Marion Gordon had not been at home all day. She was pleased to have been recognised in the movie theatre of course. Her part was small but on the whole quite stunning. Upstaging the star, she had learned, always got one noticed and talked about.

Marion Gordon, in lights, shimmered from at least three highly regarded establishments. Slipping elegantly into a phone booth she tried Erik's number again. The line hummed. Erik Muzz, magnate of the East Side laundromat empire, with his finger in every off-colour pie imaginable.

- Yes? An inflectionless voice replied at last.
- Ah, has Mr Muzz got in from London yet? she asked.
- Yes, but he is engaged.
- And where might he be engaged?
- A private matter. I am not at liberty to tell you.
- Not at liberty to tell *me*. You fool. Do you know who I am?
- Yes, came the voice. Then the line went dead.

The vile breeze ravaged her silver fox as she crashed the door behind her. Glass-like the metallic hairs pointed this way then that as if at the mercy of a magnet involved in a mad demonic dance.

Marion Gordon, worrying at her pocket for a while, headed back down Broadway to a department store at which she was widely known. Cars swam, screeched, sometimes collided in the two o'clock turmoil, gurgled into the bottleneck that frustrated all manner of modern desires, desperations, emergencies both petty and major. Again in the maddening brouhaha there was her father, setting out the croquet hoops, then, much earlier, singing her to sleep with a tune to which she could not recall the words.

Sidling into her path, this man, however, was not a memory.

- Hey lady, can you ...

Marion Gordon shot him with a withering glance, a flash that instantly took in his bedraggled overcoat, the gaping shoe, his wiry unwashed hair.

- Out of my way, rubbish! She spat, simply.

The man watched her go as she picked her way between the puddles and refuse.

- Rubbish she says. Fine I say. I asked civil didn't I? Bitch. Fuckin' fuckin' bitch. One day I'll give you a good seeing to. I'll stick it right up ya till ya fish eyes bug out on the end of their stalks!

Marion Gordon swept into Daniel's, oblivious to this heartfelt soliloquy, first checking her face in the burnished gap above **Department Store** etched into one of the shining brass plaques which adorned the building. A little something for Erik, she thought. Must smarten him up a bit, though spivs are always quite charming in their own way. Goodness knows, look what I've done to get him.

- Delighted to see you Mrs Gordon, you're looking most enchanting. How is Admiral Teach? asked the assistant specially assigned to the movie stars that drifted in. Her chief qualification was an almost unlimited capacity to absorb and make the best of the inevitable tantrums and threadbare sarcasm that came her way.

- Thank you my sweet, replied Marion Gordon. Admiral Teach is in the very best of health. Now Miss Mint, I'm after a wee trinket for a director friend of mine. It's his sixtieth birthday, the dear. What would you recommend?

- Well, for the older man a tiepin is always an amusing present. Our safari line is proving very popular, the alligator, giraffe and tiger pins have sold like hot cakes. Would madam be interested?

- I was thinking of something with a little more *restraint*. Taste is the word that this man lives by.

Hastily Miss Mint returned the solid silver wildebeest woggles to their box beneath the counter. However, she persevered.

- We have some rather dinky cufflinks just arrived yesterday from deepest Africa. Class with a touch of mystery. Now ...

But Marion Gordon had flounced away.

Perhaps a mite more loopy than usual, thought Miss Mint, but nothing unusual. Miss Mint's constitution was strong. She unwrapped a humbug from her pocket and commenced to suck.

The evening newspapers had arrived on the streets. With their malnutrition stretching their bones through weatherbeaten skin, the newsboys plied discouraged headlines whilst unhealthy pigeons picked amongst the flower stalks.

Retracing her steps, Marion Gordon entered the Snark Institute art gallery, the last stop on her itinerary. She felt washed out, the water-colours were washed out, even the air was washed out, used, smelled like a cloakroom full of wet woollen coats.

Why had somebody gone to the trouble of painting a cat, she wanted to know. It looked like Mickey. Mickey. He had been a Christmas present. Her father had carried him in one Christmas morning tucked away in a cardboard box. Her father, knowing all the while, she thought, he was writing himself into some sentimental stage show in her memory. When they moved into the apartment, after the Big Break, Mickey, now an incumbrance, had been put to sleep.

Marion Gordon had learned that through ruthlessness security could be obtained.

She dreamed of a new type of art gallery. Instead of canvasses there would be rows of white screens, every screen running one of her movies. Thousands would scramble to watch her again and again. The abandoned woman done with definitive ease; the wife bereft, weeping through her disordered tresses; the siren; the vamp.

On the way out a beetling attendant asked for her autograph. All to the good. She wrote it with a rare flourish. Rocking on his heels, a bespatted man in the lobby laboured to look consequential as indisputably Marion Gordon turned on the famous walk.

Mixing its clouds the sky was a sheet of oil. The newsboys ran back and forth, print bleeding onto the sidewalk: this morning's sensations lifted by the sporadic rain and dumped down the drains. Marion Gordon hailed a cab and got in. Consequentially, she sped away.

Another street vendor collapsed. One man grinned cheerfully. Outside the Ritz he had managed to sell Marion Gordon's autograph for fifteen dollars to a minor starlet.

Back at the stately Gordon apartment, she noticed that the flowers had wilted terribly. They always did on Chokey's day off. Somewhere down the hall a bell rang.

The boy scouts would have managed without the Admiral's inspection but business associates could not be put off so easily. Soon these bores would phone, demanding his whereabouts. It was because of *them* that she had phoned the police department, which was only right because on the floor lay her husband quite dead.

Again, but this time more frustratedly, she felt around in the pocket of her silver fox. She examined her face in the mirror. Grief was an easy one; it was only jealousy that had her stumped sometimes.

Jouncing with gay abandon, Freddy appeared from her bedroom.

- Fredders, darling cuss-cuss, come here, she demanded. Don't go *near* the Admiral. Your wise and naughty mistress has made sure, my sweet, he wont tread on your divine tail anymore.

The bell continued to ring. Falling on his side, the Admiral had flung out one arm around which was wrapped untidily an unfastened shirt sleeve. In his other colourless hand, held as if by pincers, shone a cufflink, restrained some might say, decorated with mother of pearl and chased with bloodstone.

Marion Gordon placed Freddy on his favourite couch. Between the cushions she found what she had been looking for: the remnant of a small glass phial. Handling it very carefully, for strychnine is highly poisonous even in minute traces on the skin, she mused for a moment.

The famous are always plagued by callers that will insist on arriving at the most unpredictable times. On this occasion it was the police. To say Marion Gordon panicked would be a grave understatement. Drawers, under carpets or rugs, amongst her underwear; none of these guaranteed security.

- Wait a minute, she falteringly commanded.

Freddy looked into his mistress's eyes with devotion. She forced his jaws apart, popped the phial between his sharp teeth and stroked him under the palate until he swallowed with complete trust.

Marion Gordon opened the door to the law, letting in a brief burst of the ever-ringing bell. One of the policemen looked like a cameraman she had once known. This helped famously.

- It's my husband. He's, he's. I think he's had a fit. I've been out *all* day and I came home to find him like *this*.

The other policeman pronounced Admiral Teach dead.

- Dead! Marion Gordon shrilled.

- Quite dead I'm afraid madam and the dog too.

Poor Freddy lay a lifeless duster of fur on his favourite couch. Marion Gordon raised her eyes in lamentation.

- Oh, the darling sweet angel. Freddy loved the Admiral so. The poor mite must have died of grief!

"Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes successful in show business".

Francis Coppola

" ... every aspect of everything has a number scrawled across it ..."

South of Reno Dir. Mark Rezyka

He means to sacrifice Jessica, that much is clear. But we've no way of knowing when or where ...
Not necessarily pal, 'cause I think -hic!- I got us an ace in the hole.

Wolverine (Marvel Comics Inc.)

- I said *no* ice.

The barman, who most customers, that is the ones that didn't complain about their orders, knew as Merv, picked up the drink and behind the counter deftly removed the ice with his fingers. Replacing it on the bar he continued skewering olives ready for the cocktail crowd.

- Trumpets.

Raymond spoke again, oblivious to the fingers that had dandled in his Campari.

- You been to see the chord doctor? asked Charles, softly grinning.

- Yeah, but no soap. It's that bridge that's the mutha. B seventh with an augmented fifth straight into F thirteenth then C ninth. None of those losers can get their lips round it and McShann says no substitute chords.

Raymond worked on an irregular basis for Jay McShann, leader of a small big band. He usually handled the arrangements; occasionally took the skins if the drummer was recovering from a spree.

- What do you think?

- About what Charles?

Raymond knew better than to call his new boyfriend Chokey.

- This Marion Gordon business.

- The Admiral got dead, you told me. So what?

- No, I reckon she did him in. I hear her talking to Muzzie, that's her fancy man. They been plotting.

- The Big One?

- Maybe.

- You going to turn her in? Watch yourself. Sing an Muzz'll have your ass on a plaque in his drawing room. Don't mess.

- She's plenty loaded. I'm thinking of some kind of arrangement.

- The Squeeze? Do it if you like but don't be surprised if the Denizens of Deep City fit you with air conditioning. Hear Slaine, the Berserker's out?

'Squeauk' goes the imitation black leather as Erik Muzz gets comfortable on his pneumatic rubber recliner. His manicurist is late. In his left hand he clutches what at first appears to be an anti-personnel grenade. Close acquaintances know that it is merely a droll musical box, one that plays the Dead March from *Saul* when the pin is released. In his right he cradles the baby crocodile receiver of a telephone restrainedly tooled in the skin of that animal.

He addresses his sidekick, Bayou Billy, in a low voice.

- Understand? Get on it. I ain't never seen this woman, I ain't never been out with her. I wannit wrapped up good. Pay who you have to, the columnists, everybody. Break in and steal back that damn fox. Geddit? No, the one with sleeves, it's hot. Yeah, the Union heist, that one. Dump it good. I'll handle the dame, understand? I ain't never known Marion Gordon. Get tough if you have to.

- I'm calling about the brooch, the salamander. I picked it up by mistake once. I've been ill. I can call round anytime and return it.

- No. Marion Gordon is away. She will return later.

I left Yucca Avenue late. My eyes were ashtrays and my mouth felt like a bucket of wet sand. Just past Union Station I turned left into Cahuengha and Hollywood Boulevard and slid my car into the lot. It was hot. My shirt was like wet flypaper on my back. I waited for the creaking elevator. The door opened and I got in it.

I closed my eyes and thought of the Gordon frail. No one had economised on her legs and she knew it. Maybe there had been some kink of tension behind those eyes but she hid it well.

I'd met movie actresses before of course. Mostly two-dimensional, that's one more than their films, hiding a deep vacancy behind beefcake minders and wide red light mouths that flashed green at you like the hookers on Santa Monica pier. There was something different about this one. Just maybe. She had spoken of an 'arrangement'.

That she had put the old man on ice was pretty clear. The connections were right and her alibi stank. A marriage that never got off the ground; a possible lead to Erik Muzz the rubber-cosh king of the East Side. He'd be doing his laundry by now. Things weren't good. I would need to put in a lot of work on the clews though to make anything stick with the DA. Movie actresses fielded bigshot lawyers.

The doors scratched open and air like hot iron blasted between them. I walked to my office and thought of arrangements.

Yeah, that's it. I'm the janitor here. Tuesday I was working in the apartment just down the hall there. They'd been onto me for months. Doorbell keeps sticking, that kind of shit. Anyway, I was checking the wiring, running a trace into the basement. I thought the Gordons were out, they're not quiet people see, at least she ain't. Visitors all hours of the day and night, crashing and bashing about like a damn battleground. She says she left at nine? Naw, it must've been later. I'd been fiddling with that half-assed bell for at least three hours. You wanna know something? She was in too much of a hurry to notice me but I see her head off to the elevator in a mighty rush round eleven or half past. I says to myself, something funny there, her in that silver coat an all. Still, you know these movie stars, light's on but no one at home today. Even then I didn't fix that damn bell. Must be possessed or something.

ON THE ILL TIP

Am I the only one that can hear it? thought Dale. There they are: detectives for defectives. Seating carefully arranged so that only two can be kept in vision at once; the other three observe.

The Consultant Psychiatrist's office is two doors down from the Emergency Room. The Consultant Psychiatrist confers with her assistants.

Dale waits outside. She is in their hands. Out here the bell is even louder.

The Patient is low, washed-out, not the type for group therapy though. Medication sometimes works. What was that about the dreamhome? Oh, just some nonsense.

NARDIL. IMIPRAMINE.
LUDOMIL.
CARBAMEZEPINE.

Frontiering between the full stops and silences fall drop of doom syllables weaker than kittens. Lovers like maybe they take and forget for us things we cannot.

Kill Time.

Neglect of family and of body. Don't care wont care. Windows not to stare through but look at. Walls blanking white thoughts in a white shade.

Mind Our Ways.

We obviously err. On the rocks.

Separation.

Storm out of the crowded cafe. Late-nite lighted house. Grappling cries of children unheard. But no decree absolute granted between us and ourselves.

Love And Leave Us

On The Shelf.

Why we should be happy. Loving yourself is the first step.

We have no idea if such a thing could happen.

Raise Your Socks And Be Merry.

Modern hopes a handful of dust. Desire a trick from an earlier English. The thing not worth having still beckons with a leer across the valley drop, the shattered bridge. Beyond always.

There's Something Indecent About Us.

Mill. Pine. Mine. Earthy nice sounds. A crying shame.

Now it's time.

Close the haiku

with

LITHIUM

Understand there will be side effects. Your hands may tremble and expect your vision to blur. Do not rise suddenly from a chair. Avoid alcohol and the foods on this list which we will give you. On no account discontinue the drug without proper supervision. Prolonged usage will bring dependency and impair thyroid function. Increase the dose when we tell you.

The only one that can hear. It's in the inside of my head.

They tell me to attend these things and I go. The groups make a change from the hospital, its too-green plastic plants and anti-static carpet tiles.

HAPPY IS UP SAD IS DOWN

An institutional room. Coffee mornings. The wooden floor streaked by the rubber feet of walking frames. That smell as of old teabags. Garish green chairs five high against the wall. Decoration not shabby but used. Buzz as the fluorescent tube fails overhead. A mirror and below in black, 'What Kind of Person Suffers From Mental Illness?' Everything familiar. One of these places again. Yellow poster someone forgot to take down. 'Modern Dance'. Step, one, two. Mind out of the way. 'He's good though, mind'. Mind your step, one, two. MIND.

We don't or can't dance. They let us meet here on Thursday nights after the old people have gone home. We sniff in their smell; it prevents us from becoming occupied with each other. Not poor or out of work, in some cases with everything to live for, as they say, we collect weakly with others of our kind. The ice never broken. We embarrass

ourselves and each other. Stand broken and busted, ask what kind of weeks we've had and always think behind the pleasantness how fucked up we are.

We don't sing. Mr Quentin, that's the group leader, tried it once after he heard the coffin-dodgers round off their evening with 'We'll Meet Again'. He forgot none of us are nostalgic. 'But I know we'll meet again some sunny day'. He sang the first verse of 'Morning Has Broken' by himself then gave up. Maybe it would be good for us to sing, but then after negotiating the journey, bus or car, then working up the courage to walk into this room, there is nothing left for that kind of personal intrusion.

We don't give away anything about ourselves. Not likely. We check our watches every ten minutes until it is time to go. Peek. Talk about nothing. Peek. If someone crosses the forbidden frontier into real feelings we can listen instead to the murmur of the bar downstairs, bark of the guard dog, a drunk happy to sing on the wet pavement. We have all memorised the language of the problem pages. One of us even met Tom Crabtree from *Cosmopolitan* once. Skilled in talking around issues, that's what we do. The stakes driven through our hearts cannot be raised. We are heathens of gloom in an optimistic town, glittered by the proceeds of Southern silicon chip industries. Our chips however, are down.

Marlene is sitting over there. A cheesecloth summer dress, though it is near winter now. Black dangly earings, hair neat and shining, she could be out for dinner. We all watched her the first week. She talked of this and that, her husband, children, the new car with spoilers, the house, the porch they were building onto it. In May she brought along a book about agoraphobia. Some of the symptoms were hers, she said. Marlene doesn't go out now. Maybe turns up here once or twice a month. We think she talked herself into it. We imagine her trapped face as it peers out the window at home, over the mushed sand and stacked bricks of the incomplete porch. Her husband left a while back. Marlene said she let him down.

That's the new girl by the ashtray. Feet pressed together at the toes, she sits and shakes then traps her hands still between her knees. What can a person like this do all day we think. She is not one of us old-stagers. It is not worth even talking, for we have all felt this thing creep back upon us as we walk or drive home, to maybe sleep or spin out the night with a book, dark sounds jittering our skewed imaginations. So she is left to sit and smoke. Could be just a downer she's on. This club is not interested in temporary states.

We go our separate ways for another week. Feet clunking downstairs seal us off until next Thursday. The bar is closed, a few last-chancers loiter and make insinuations

from another world on a high. Watch your step. Mind your *p*'s and *q*'s. Mind your manners. Mind over matter, so they say. There is no point in lingering outside for a last word. We have ignored each other for another week. No words have engaged and no touch has been perpetrated. The new girl shambles off to consider herself in a small room. On the way to our places we plan the week's adjustments. Masturbation, maybe for loneliness; longing, the stomach can take care of; try loud music; the TV; sleep; increase your regular dosage if necessary. Pull a fast one on your mind. We harbour a multitude of compulsions. Some of us are in debt. Still, they say it's a great life if you don't weaken, don't mind other people, don't mind your mind too much, don't let life get you down.

Yes, the last twist of the knife. We fit the key, open the door, sit down. We rest minds like soft hands in knife boxes against the cotton wool glow of a child's night light. We don't like the dark. Naturally.

HOUSE MUSIC

Broken Morning. One dream remembered. Runaway from milling crowd in shoeless feet. Sweet bitter memories and the rain I can't stand on the window. Yolks of broken eggs fry across the pan. Snap out and put a bold face on it. Half a generic pizza like a lonely glove lost between the rails. Sunny side. Say the wrong things I always say the wrong things. 'Stop the baby crying 'cos my head is killing me'. Impaired in a moment. A screw loose. Loser mind, lose your mind, lose your marbles.

A room. Someone's this time. My feet rock in the thick pile of the carpet I knew would be beige. Off to a bad start already, the others look askance then struggle their faces into welcomes warm as cancer. I'd sussed this place out a few days before. A mile or so out of town, through the red light area and past the hospital. Looking forward to it but then as the day came round I felt no, finally decided to walk past then was forced in here to get out of the rain.

This house is too clean. Clattering comes from the kitchen. The door is ajar and I see a woman. She does not want us here. Anyplace but her home. Eyes through the gap glower Misery-guts and Whinger. Still, she can always listen, incline her accusing mind as such people do, file me away an open and shut case and in case of alarm break the glass.

A brown velour sofa to match the beige. No waves of colour to rock the boat or cause a storm in our teacups. Another place not lived in. No stains, dogs or cats or

abandoned dog-eared magazines, just that waiting-room clock on the mantlepiece, waiting to peal its glad chime every quarter. I already know life to be very long, that is, when you've a left-handed mind, when your genes aren't hung properly, when lovers are only things you invent, when life is two meals a day on pizza and quarter-pound bags of frozen peas. I'm not angry. 'Do I wake to find you asleep in the deep of my heart, dear?'

I introduce myself. No, Dale with a *D*. Unemployed. I had a job in London but it fell through. An idler they think. A young 'un going through a phase. Nothing better to do than listen to other people's real problems. They make up their minds to hold back. Stand me in a bar and I mimic the way they slouch, their washed out voices, their stories of illness and domestic upheaval. They decide to hold back. Break. Broken. 'I learned the truth at seventeen, that life is meant for beauty queens.' Chased, but wouldn't give him a second look. On the bright side. Blighted, mildewed, knackered, fucked, gone west. He gives me the creeps you know. Listen from the kitchen and learn about the lonelies. Grit your teeth. Cheer up chicken. Get it off your chest. Times are tough.

MR PITIFUL

Marlene on the wall looks in. He looked in the rain blemished window. Heard like this a broken chorus. Water roars through lock gates on shattered hinges, down by the dump, the road to ruin. To break the ice as it were.

- Kelly? I'm Pete. This is our first male awareness workshop. Should be OK. The herb tea is over there.

Kelly joined the predictable cross-legged circle. Already a calf muscle had gone to sleep from this unfamiliar position, but he grimaced the necessary cosiness. Next to him a man with long hair tucked into his parka petted a young Alsatian. Kelly stroked the dog in what turned out to be the wrong direction. It growled.

- Funny how people can show affection to animals but not to each other, said the man. I'm Holly. Look, I make these.

He showed Kelly a polished wood contraption like a crimping iron.

- I'm on a government incentive scheme for long-term UB40s. Been making these percussion instruments for three years now. They're African.

Shaken from side to side the crimping iron sounded like a broken football rattle being whirled underwater.

- What are we going to do? asked Kelly.
- This workshop? I'm not sure about it myself. I s'pose we just talk, discuss common problems. Being blown out by yer missus, that kind of stuff.
- What if you haven't got a missus?
- We should be a supportive, caring group.
- No, I mean, what happens if you've been given the push by your mister? How will we approach that?
- Same way I guess. I need more tea.

The dog began to whimper as Holly picked his way across the room in search of fennel tea. Affection. Modern impossible. Cry me a river down the dark end of the street.

Him now them. With her off to do the dirty. But a bored score. At a loose end and nothing better to do than cop off. Me in the bar with two empty chairs. Bitter and twisted knickers, contemplating a strange fruit, a mental, going apeshit, a flight off the handle, off the rocker, off my box, haywire. Them and me the invisible man. That's what friends are for.

Rise and shine and show a leg. Endless Sunday sweats past the meridian as clouds swat sunny skies. Designer molecules pump through the braking mind and shift it into neutral. But always chinks of the dungeon stab through cracks in your narcotic freeze, break the ice. Eyes in a mirror pupilled by the bathroom light. Danger zone. Swing your face away and reach for the disconnecting bottles behind.

Drain blocked brain holding back in broken sleep. I'm being as nice as I can though. Her royal shyness. One guy for every girl. How time flies. Tears dry on your penny-wise collar. 'I wish you'd known me when I was alive, I was a funny fella'.

I'm trying to be nice, though I've given up hope with this already. An ex-friend thought to put me wise on the benefits of co-counselling, that was just before he made his pass, a kind of preliminary I suppose. Look, I'm caring and sensitive. He took it to heart.

The word got round at college: something a bit wrong with Dale. We should have known from the boiler suit.

A liquidizer or coffee grinder rips its mutilation through the kitchen door, her revenge, a reminder of the argument she's bound to have had with Matt. He, the man of the house, will preside over our useless confessions of anxiety, inadequacy, longing and other tribulations. A face boiled pink and hair neat enough to have been clipped on in one piece. He smiles too much, never stops and I know this is the only thing I will take home tonight. His smile now like the leer of a comic strip villain. Matt enjoys himself, a mathematician, everything in his life neatly numerical, alphabetical, everything in its place and everything with a place. Somewhere religion will have to come in and I brace myself. I wont be anyone's sunbeam.

The clock chimes and instructions are given. Why have we come here? What do we expect? We must find a partner. Talk about yourself for five minutes but no longer. I will time you. This is the rule. An American idea. Healing needs discipline.

I'll talk about the same old things and try to ignore their mechanical sympathy. It's like an interrogation, the jolly preamble designed to wear you out so you'll say anything just to say something, embroider your minor traumas into things more impressive and poignant. I'll ramble about him, my failed romance. Since I'm not coming back for the next session it's safe to unload it. Exhaust another set of faces I wont see again. A strip of kitchen light cracks the carpet. Sets the mood. Drown and don't wave.

Stars of orange street light through smeared spectacles. Obscure memory. Broken dream. Bleeding nose and mother-held-hand. School size sandals. Soles that melt in the gas fire. Pig eyes. Squint eyes. Four eyes. I buried them. They called me names. Night-lighted orange so dark to the doctor's. You can close them. Cauterising hand not for eyes to see. Vessels seared shut up and sleep. Shut up. A voice like ice: close your eyes.

Matt sits back as Dennis tells all in three hundred seconds. A genuinely crumpled person I think, hating his catalogue suit, those faun nylon socks and styleless black shoes. It comes out, his head sunk towards the floor, voice wavering in the approved manner, a catch now and then. His wife, a decent catch, gone away, but then they told her she'd only got six months at most. A cyst that turned into something nasty. A pain in the ovaries.

Then there's the kids. Wayne only two. I still love her. 'What did I do to be so black and blue?' The wife

But Matt beams. Five. The rule.

He suggests that we sing. I wondered how long this would take. Pasty face Matt suggests 'Michael Row the Boat Ashore' and all I want to do is to smash that maddening clock into his hypocritical fundamentalist head. Bought and sold on the idea, the others agree. Clatter again from the kitchen. Yes, I'm still here you pathetic buggers. I hope she drowns them out.

Full fathom four. Lies you tell me. Where are the shadows when the sun goes down? Aware circle. Brokenly snide snapped. Her and him. Alone moan. Womb broom and spasm chasm. 'Dirty words for dirty minds written in a toilet town'. Him alone. Suture self. Another time, another place.

- It seems to me that we'll have to decide something about gayness, said Kelly, dictatorial, addressing the group. What do we mean by 'male', when is a male not a male? See kind of what I mean?
- I don't see that it makes a difference, said another. As long as we collect regularly. Become a group.
- But, continued Kelly. I want to know where we're at. What things it will be appropriate to say and what not.
- Well, if you are gay Kelly, then I'm sure none of us mind, ventured Holly.
- I'm not, but if I were then is it still maleness we're talking about or something else?

Kelly lost his thread and the homely hubbub of blow-outs, tap-offs and other male crises returned. 'This is great', said a cross-legged figure on the right to no one in particular. 'This is great'. Victim of some skin disease, scales flaked from the red patches beneath his scalp and under his eyes. Only large insects gave Kelly this same feeling of revulsion. He looked away and around the room at the James Dean poster painted with red lips, the tangled wind chimes hanging from the curtain rail and the Stallone bikinied in blue crepe paper.

Talking in the dark. Tongueless eye. Page traps tricky words but cannot hold true emptiness. Hold me a day when I'm hurting like this.

Throw me a line I'm sinking fast. Matt, skin like bacon partly cooked, smiles like a nowhere man. I'm up. On the spot. Dennis snuffles into a napkin but only voices, no touch, because it's an American idea. I'll tell it to her, not them, to the swivelling ears jollying along the puff pastry in the kitchen.

We met in Russia. A package tour to Leningrad actually, I think, but this detail is not essential to the tragedy. I tell them about him, tell it like a column from an advice page. That's how it sounds. Matt will take the place of a reply printed in bold: join clubs, try raffia work, square-dancing, weaving, brave the mothballs of Oxfam, volunteer. Think positive, try hug therapy, greet the morning mirror with 'I am beautiful'.

He spoke to me, not many seem to, but in a different way. Not how some with one look decide whether you're fuckable or a dog. We caught up with each other a few times in London. That's when I realised as he touched my hand that I can't afford to feel, not after all this time. Barriers built to forget deserting friends in bars, them not me. Adjustments made to offset loneliness become part of you. See? How could I let him take these away? Kitchen-sound period.

Too soon lips and tongue in the car. Heater going. Stroke of hands just out of gloves. Stop. Smell hair leaves. A different mouth. Feel like a victim again. Melted ice slides down the windscreen. Please, he said. Stop.

People had begun to mill around the door and leave. Kelly talked to Phil. Gays and guys and girls.

- So I've got someone to scratch my itch at last, said Phil.
- I met a girl in Russia a few years back, said Kelly.
- What's she like? Did she get on top, y'know being communist and all that?
- It was someone else on the trip. At art college. English. We bumped into each other at the Hermitage. That's a gallery.
- Artsy-fartsy type?
- No. Weird. Intriguing. We met in London a couple of

times after. I blew it I suppose. Got pretty fed up after. One of few opportunities and I had to cock it up.

- My technique is to keep 'em guessing. Be a man of mystery. That Shads tune.
- I refuse to have a technique, perform. All that. Still, as myself I'm just an angry face ache. Not even young anymore.

Squandered youth. Look back in. Angry orange memories score a ravine. Mine the mind. Taking care of business. Random jobs. Someone'll take care of me. Mind frayed at thirty. Mind your self. Grind out the truth. Mother hand holds back. Cracking up over it. These useless ten years. Big tears mean nothing. Back with vengeance.

Hurry up. It's time. America without tears. Nothinging. I told them, like talking to him but watching from the wings the sidelines. Kicked into touch. There and not there and again how I cannot feel. Don't care wont care.

Words pass on nothing of this. That sinking sigh as you look towards the strip of lighted bridge. Those lights night-orange and dismal like yesterday's single phone call, silent before you could reach it.

'This is great'. Skin disease. The boy with a problem smiled fixedly at the night through the door.

- I'm twenty-nine. But it was just like this is the thing I should want but I didn't. That's what I thought. How do you want a person like they're a compact disc player?
- Kelly mate. Your thinking's all wrong.

Words. The means not to end. Like the claws of life. Is very long. Too embedded. Them not me.

But I tell them before the bell, before Matt's soiled smile shuts my trap. We couldn't connect on any level, interface, communicate. Hoping that they too read the advice pages. Know the language.

Continental interference mixes the signal. Unsplices the mind. Think I'm go-go.

Kelly stuck his head back in the door to dodge the rain leaking from a split gutter.
- I'm too twisted and selfish for anyone else. Some of us are
just made that way. Have a good life.

To leave, to break, to love. Verbs, infinitely, infinitively locked. Loners shut from person and subject. Vulgar clodded meanings. Modern impossible. Heartache behind the door of an ending.

Autumn-beautiful dead colours. Candles shine from on top of powder-painted walls and from front windows as I make my way back. Return not even free from the stupidity of metaphor. A Hindu festival of some sort. Candles with their fragile light just out of the red light area. Cash register busy bodies mince through fairy-tale streets. Wander lust. For sale, for hire, for your pleasure.

The evening's faces already foul each other on the field of memory. A failed evening. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Old leaves wont turn. Looking stupidly forward to the next waiting room.

Life is very long but endings are easy. As lying. Strand of peaceful blank paper. Fill in the gaps yourself. Join the dots. White cat in a snowstorm. 304 jerks of the second hand, a John Cage cadenza. Hammers strike but on strike. Endings are easy. Here we just stop

MOODS FOR MODERNZ

"A Book Full of Thrills"

Madmen

By Jose Mora 7/- net.

"The book contains a good deal of the cult of Spiritualism with characters and incidents drawn from Bohemian life, and not a little of sex and marriage, which seems to bulk largely in many of the most popular novels at present."

- Aberdeen Journal

only random thoughts come out since you quit and all because ever since you got here youve had it rammed down your throat how unacceptable smoking is and been cut in the street and suffered lectures from a fresh faced fool who probably bathes three times a day between molesting choirboys and people bore you with their elaborate allergies and expect you to beam over the tensile length of their bodies and listen to their exercise habits whilst sneering at your lack of will power then steering you safely outside and expect you to empathise with their addiction to a partner that you know cannot possibly work out

he invoked the conjunction an elegy to something as thoughts ran dumb through his mind *and* like *therefore* only not

this an imitation of someone who can fine-tune words better than he

and everyone agreed. Found hanging from a light
fixture, the Lithuanian sculptor did for himself
because everyone agreed that the leg muscles, to be exact
the quadriceps, of the lion he had carved for the war memorial
were imperfectly executed. A subsequent meeting of the graves
commission failed to determine whether his name should be added
to the list of war victims

Zounds!! Doth the boy mock?

But consider this:

Age:	27
Place of Birth:	Manchester, England
Occupation:	Travelling knife-grinder. Liar.
Favourite colors:	Putrefaction purple. Dark black.
Clothes:	Anything with a smidgen of sleaze. Fiorucci accessories; Airwairs from England; precious family heirlooms: tiaras, a hatpin breathed on by Queen Victoria, Dad's original rocker jacket, etc. Trash and clash.
Cosmetics:	Clarins 'Multi-Tenseur Buste'; Max Factor 'Revivifier'; Elizabeth Arden; Renacer Liposome Complex. Tend to go for products tested extensively on animals.
Music:	Original punk combos. Lately, DJ Chuck ChillOut, Kool Chip & Steady B.
Pastimes:	Spending money. Stamp collecting. Poverty.
Quotes:	"Climb every mountain" - Julie Andrews. "I've got no blood anymore" - Morrissey.
Foods:	Rhubarb(Tusky)/Gooseberry Crumble.
Writers:	Anything sensational, melodramatic and disposable.
Films:	*Harold and Maud*; *10 Rillington Place*; *Westworld*. Anything hallucinogenic by Ken Russell.
Dislikes:	People who discovered Talking Heads in '86; wing collars; loud noises; mortality; narrow-minded woolbrains and cabbage.
Idols:	Jack Lemmon; Marie Curie; Hank Williams; Liberace.

or: <u>The Wah-Wah Pedal</u>

An old favourite. Also known as the "Fuzz-Wah" but not to be confused with the "Fuzzbox". The signal is recycled via a preamped transponder loop and shunted through a sliding potentiometer causing pleasurable distortion effects. Next time you are in the

shower place one hand flat on the side of your ribcage directly beneath the arm and flap like a bird. This is the "Wah-Wah" sound. Mainly a sixties fad but desperately in need of a revival. It can be heard put to good effect on the soundtrack of *Shaft*, a violent police thriller featuring a black detective of that name who wears wool hats. Also hear Hendrix *et al* in the movie *Woodstock*.

but talk to me

A: a kumquat is a plum-sized orange-like fruit with sweet rind and acid pulp used in preserves

Antony Braxton is a saxophonist who identifies his compositions with mathematical formulae and in hard times has made a living as a professional chess player

A faith healer once cured my grandmother's warts by getting her to repeat mumbo-jumbo under a full moon

Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge, successful but now dead exponents of the jazz trumpet, had flat spots on their upper lips. This damage was concordant with their pursuit of F above high C, also called 'Super F.'

The Dream Detective

his greatest since *Bees in Amber*

and why is nostalgia such a dirty word when nostradamus its antidote beckons from a few column inches below and dont you too think of terrific things because life is the flat blue baseline of a hospital oscilloscope and intensive care is what you need but dont get or dispense so you slip the noose of normal depression and on your shoulder is your dads arm his voice kindly laughing because you thought a turf accountant was a place where you bought a new lawn

but what is your most impressive achievement?

A: Trying to steal the first chorus Joe Pass plays on "You Stepped Out of a Dream", the standard tune by Johnny Mercer. I skipped work for a week, restrung my Gibson 375 copy and got down to it. The project ended after four days when the record wore out but by then I'd lifted eight bars and they're *fast*. I can still play them today. Those

eight bars are mine.

and regard that linoleum cigar of flesh because its the mp who passed by whistling run rabbit run and that buzz bomb blew more than his skin off so think about the field executions and the unreported thousands buried in the snug of collapsing underground tunnels before you believe in the crow of the pathe cock or the glow of a tabloid sunset

THE BREAKERS

She looks like she learned to dance from a series of still pictures

Ladders in conditioned skin malignly lesion a green multigrade sea. Wires, horizon-pressed, gangle over wail-roads, slur a mirror-sky, bend the negatives beyond our ken. A watery jaunt to an impact. Parallels of wooden piles stretching out from effluent-laden beaches, punch lemmings into a rinse of toothpaste-white and a last hacking breath across the gravelled shallows. Anemone organs and seaweed intestines bared by ebb and flow retractors, farting a rot of mortuary mixed with ozone. Made alive and hurting by the sick slick slobber of spray. You might have been saved.

Saturday, April 24th, 1985. Battersea, London, England. The wind blew north at 20mph with the temperature at ten degrees Celsius. Deborah Smith ('Bill' to her friends), had been woken by her alarm clock at 6.45am. Her mother, divorced, 49, supervised Deborah's medication then drove her daughter in their Ford Escort (1979 model, 72,000 miles) to the railway station. At precisely 8.03am Deborah boarded the train to the coast (St. Austell, Cornwall), all set for the rendezvous with her brother (Kelly Smith) at 2.30pm.

Another ladder, but can fix it with nail varnish I suppose. Hardly feel it today. Only bending from side to side or in the evenings. What next? Baldness. Nausea. "You can't cope Mrs Smith. We'll have to take Deborah in". Always the big 'might'. He said, "you lack lust, you're so lack-lustre", and was pleased with himself for this. Course, he doesn't

know. Men and their brains. Then the seaweed will be out in force, like angelica on a birthday cake, to make me puke. Slip out at night while Kelly's sleeping. Might work. Might not've been this way. Must stop. Thinking the posthumous chapter. She might understand.

We might have been taken in
It may have been those little things

The coast-bound train arrived at exactly 2.14pm. Deborah disembarked at the station and occupied one of the seats in the waiting room (third from the left, in a block of eight), and read *The Odyssey* (by Mr Homer, a blind Greek). Kelly Smith met her at 2.32pm and they took a cab to their rented cottage (one hundred pounds per week, in the off season) some nine miles distant, arriving at 3.17pm.

Malignant, not benign. Stop. Shouldn't have squeezed that spot. Blood on my cheek and on my hand now. Stupid body, a constant source of embarrassment. Everyone looking. Errrr? Film in the camera for memories. 'That's my deceased sister'. Killed by a hush-hush word you know. Train on time but wont talk about it. A breath of fresh'll do you a power of good. Mum rang. Three three times a day and the big yellow one at night. Might work. Might as well make a go of it.

We may have been happy once
We may have been short-sighted
It might have been that cat-eared purse you remember, with the one penny inside for luck

<u>Composition: Blues in Green</u>

Lackadaisical hand that touted the camera out to sea. Tilted the horizon into artificial, an instrument on a pilot's panel, banking the green-grey boundary out of horizontal. Grey plastic skin penetrated in a strip-tease of shutter leaves and mirror, by a stiletto stab of nougat light. Like this other camera. One that shoots, peppers her dysplastic body with a wave of cobalt. Framed cheaply on the flickering TV, the photograph. High speed surf,

trapped, braked in the sand of a high-speed emulsion. Fuzzed, unfocussed, like her now, thinks Mrs Smith, moving the picture onto the sideboard. With words. Out of sight, maybe mind. Her eyes glaze. Her daughter freeze-framed, who never had the patience to take a good picture.

Breaker line Breaker contact Breaker date Breaker heart Break er word

We may have been missing the signs
She may have been thinking about it for
months

At 4.03pm Deborah went to bed for her necessary afternoon sleep. She was woken at 7.06pm by her brother Kelly and at 7.33pm both proceeded to Lester's Plaice, a restaurant and bar in Byron Road. It was a chilly six degrees and the wind was blowing in from the sea.

Hope it's OK for her to drink. Looks pale. Disinterested. Drugs maybe? Try to stay off this topic. Lester's is usually so busy, can't hear yourself think anyway. We'll spend the evening insulting the local wide boys and the Sharons and Tracies pecking at their Babychams.

A Night Out With The Buoys

- Oi Ben. Oi! Shit-for-brains. Ya fuckin' deaf cunt. What you 'aving?
- Wine? You fuckin poofter!
- Ah, fuck off, you old arse-bandait!
- Didya ger a root last night ?
- Fucked you over? What a laugh. Gonna get shit-faced tonight?
- I'll tell ya mate. I was gutted. Get us a pack of butts will ya?
- Phwoar! Look at 'er. Wouldn't mind doin' that some damage. Oi love! Wanna go halves on a bastard?
- Three pints of piss and some dry roasted mate and by the way, yer petticoat's showing.
- Is that a new motor then, ya flash git?

- Yeah. I'm pretty well wedged up at the moment. New gaff as well.

- And you make me pay? Ya fuckin tight bastard!

- Bloody 'ell, this place is full of sausages tonight. Look at 'im. Oi! Queen Elizabeth! Limp-wristed faggot.

- Oi Ben. Oi! Shit-for-brains. Get us another pint. Hey darlin', wanna see my third leg?

We might have been able to prevent this
Rubber jives Rubber soul Rubber talk Rubber heart Rubber words
We might have been able to prevent this

Sighnz

BATHING STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. STRONG TIDES AND DANGEROUS CURRENTS - By Order H.M. Coastguard.
NO BATHING BETWEEN THE RED FLAGS.
SPRING TRAGEDY - Woman missing presumed drowned - St. Austell Herald
Bleared transparent drug bottles on the dresser
Choppy water. Wreck buoy rings, Keep Away! Keep Away!
Blip, Blip, the lightship off the horizon.
Early morning man and dog come across bloated thing on the margin of the waves.
She might have been swimming. Caught unawares. You know, might have overestimated her strength. Didn't see them red flags. Anything but that.

Those awful relationships she had. Men always rubbed her up the wrong way. Treated like a curiosity then dumped. Ringing me, full and shouting 'on my wick, my nerves, my tits. Don't crowd, don't bug, can't breathe. Give me space, a chance, room, room to breathe.' She couldn't breathe.

We should have noticed the signs
We should have been more watchful
We should have realized the hurting

All Blues

Pain lasts long but it gets things done. Writes this. That timbre of mood impossible to trap, like the fade of the maroon, back flashing on Remembrance Sunday. Waking in the night. Severed payphone cord and twisted car antenna. Spite full. Flickering filaments. The cliches of written feeling. Wrecked. Withered. Puckered and soap-shined skin. Confusion like a fuzz-choked hairbrush. Life is hard but the sea feels worse.

Kelly Smith and Deborah left Lester's Plaice at 11.34pm and walked through the light rain, back to their seafront holiday cottage. Deborah complained of the cold and was brought an extra blanket and hot water bottle by her brother. She retired at 12.26am, but Kelly remained in the sitting room and watched the television, (the late film, *Double Indemnity*, starring Edward G. Robinson).

My dream. Full of pretty dead things. A hash of memories like the grinning bloody rabbits grandad caught in snares before he died. The fit of a dancing body, jittering under the strobe. Flashes of the wasteground we used to play in behind the house, before the tractors moved in, grafted the green clean and left abraded brown. These hawthorn tree homes. My one, with two thorns side by side for the elevator switches, an executive model and Dad nailing planks between the boughs to sit on. When I still had an imagination.

We may have been made of anger and guilt
We might have tried harder

Breaker habit Breaker pane Breaker way Break down Breaker bar Breaker body

Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This. Who Am I To Disagree? Travel The World And The Seven Seas. Everyone Is Looking For Something.

The dream gelatines a new rhythm dance. Risible as the see-saw and spite full hiss of wild palms winnowed by stale sea breezes. Funny, after those times hanging round the margin, the waves of iced and glaced people able to connect. Twist and whirl to buried grace notes,

swimming a fingerprint across the boards of nothing so surgical as desire. Little things. Pastilles. Bonbons. Dressed up to the nines. Pray lean cream. Tired and weathered. Taken in, taken apart, taken home, taken down, taken for a ride. But not to heart.

But a new dance. Up the stairs of an *Amityville Horror* mansion, portraits lower out of guilty frames. Some of the compost faces are known. Wiped by the catatonic tarantella, horrid faces cut into a horror room composed with brass-wired cages. Air smells of musk and sandalwood but things are dead. Starved of something. Empty water bottles are crusted with scale. Seed containers gape. Who deserted the pet emporium? Outside, the sky is ice-chip grey. Stroboscopic dance pans a slide show of faces that have waited to die. Unable to escape, to cash in their chips. An imagined blaze of glory. Gory, no-name animals, grinning dead through scrapbook faces. Raspberry lips and blackcurrant eyes. That mad conger eel in *Mysteries of the Sea* grafted onto vegetable creatures from the deep. Birds fluffed in grey piles in the corners of their cages. Pan flashes an ocelot face. Eye winks then closes. Daymare winds the dance through sea breezes into green.

Sunday, April 25th. 25mph wind gusting from the water. Temperature at ten degrees. 10.24am, Deborah Smith and her brother walked down the beach at low tide, beginning at the north pier. She took six photographs with Kelly's camera in spite of the bad light. 11.46am, they climbed the steps to the promenade and had a light lunch at Moxie's. Deborah complained of slight nausea.

Green. I often thought of cutting a block of you to take home. Must collude. Murder. After, expect a life of 'why?' Taboo. Like Ophelia. Crossroads and stake through the heart. Anticipate days of hopeless gazing into cream apartment walls. Nothing so focussed as grief. Bob a job. Bob a murder. 'Topped 'erself', say the buoys. Socrates and tank-man Rommel. Worn-out welcomes. Find something to cling to in this wash of pointlessness. Four good friends, a tabby called Elmer, train-numbers, football-pools, narcissism, pot plants, grandchildren, even the thought of the final solution. You might have been saved.

We might have realized sooner
We should have been looking for signs
We should have sought help

Sunny Skies and Mr Zero

- Seek our help. Give the client someone to network with. Don't let a permanent solution occur for what, in most cases, is only a temporary problem.

Conditioned and aerated skin flexes in profile across the mirror on the wall. Ms Skies dwells on oat bran and cunnilingus, accustomed to these silences. Then Mr Zero pipes up

- I'm disturbed with your ideology. Is prevention always appropriate, surely some have the right?

Limpid little squit, thinks Sunny Skies.

- We at the Bureau believe that 99% of cases can be talked out of this ideation. It's a question of interfacing correctly, assessing risk and lethality, giving the client something to live for.

- But surely being human is all that's needed? Mr Zero, now riled, settling into the role of opponent.

Spotty faced reptile. Ms Skies adjusts her sweat-shirt of sunny yellow, just washed, fluffy on the skin. Ooooo.

Then Ms Born Again butts in. A friend. You know he wanted to. Threatened to, you know. Never felt so helpless, inadequate. What to do? About it. You know. It.

- Refer them to the professionals. We processed 47,000 clients last year. Quite a turnover eh?

Unimpressed, Zero chips in

- Why not just call them 'units'? Make the operation sound completely impersonal.

Jesus wept, thinks Sunny. Perhaps I ought to take the little bugger aside and slip him 40 Tylenol. The homeopath told me to avoid stress as well. Always one shit ready for sabotage.

- We find the vocabulary useful. It discourages our volunteers from becoming emotionally over-involved.

Ms Born Again confers with Mr Pro-Capital-Punishment. Well, yes. In the end he simmered down but I was petrified by it. Anyone would be, wouldn't they? Silly sausage 'e was.

- If you'll just leaf through our brochure, continued Ms Skies, you'll find some interesting statistics.

- I don't envy you your job, blurts Punishment. Weakness of character is what it boils down to.

The door slams behind Mr Zero.

- Yes, that's partly it, says Sunny Skies, brightly. Physical exercise is a big help would you believe. Drives those nasty depressants away. May I call you 'Pro'?

- Certainly. Although I dare to say it, national service would cure the problem. Outdoor life, hiking, obstacle courses. Communal showers, that kind of thing.

- Sounds exquisite Pro. What happened to that awful Mr Zero?

- Oh, he's harmless. Highly strung. A shirt-lifter I wouldn't wonder.

Wondering lee words. That dead dream. Plates out of a pathology textbook. Bodies buttered with crusted blood and slime. A hieroglyph of modern feeling. Not a cry for help. Options closed. Now. Before the breath and pump and drain machines take over, expose your heart in a cathode blip. Consign yourself to pretty green.

Deborah and Kelly arrived back at the cottage at 1.32pm. Deborah took up her letters and her brother looked out of the front window at the returning fishermen and the gulls wheeling over their nets. She took her medication at 2.15pm. Three pink capsules.

Wave length Wave back Wave train Wave aside Wave function Wave break Wave goodbye

<u>Composition: The Breaker's Yard.</u>

Waves. An unintentional patch of green below rusty cliffs, elbows into the frame enclosing the wreckers' ground. Ford, Fergusson, Hobart, Acme. A storm of wasted muscle, flattened into kodachrome. Exposed ignition entrails ripped and spilled, like cables of kelp plugged into crevices. Yellow foam and torn vinyl skin, scabbing pragmatic colour paint and haemorrhaging gearboxes. A washed-up scatter of decaying driftwood. Dead. Light-cluster jellyfish puckering under sunny skies, nudged by lines of fan belt bladderwrack.

One who never had the patience to take a good picture. Off centre. Skewed. Hand-shake smeared. Again, like her. On the ill tip. On the margin, the red electromagnet hovers above a Ford on the critical list. Outside the frame somewhere, crushing hydraulic jaws gape.

Never made it to the TV, but trashed in a forgetting drawer of her things. With the negatives. Don't dare to ask why she took it, this picture, these dead metal memories, she took, feeling like them. Useless. Waiting. 'All I need is a photograph to remind me of the way you used to be'.

Deborah slept for three hours and woke at 6.32pm. Ten minutes later, Kelly returned from a walk along the beach. He carried a few pieces of strangely shaped driftwood. At 7.15pm, Kelly and Deborah left the cottage for the nearest restaurant, (Angelo's, Whistler Road.)

We didn't have any idea
We should have realized the consequences
We should have been watching

The wink of that caged eye. Blip of a sign. Choppy green. Those last three pinks. Dance tonight and dissolve far out in stirring wires that cut the breath.

Pain staking Pain full Pain less Pain free

They returned at 11.02pm. Kelly felt tired and at 11.45pm both went to bed.

Release Relief

Tap of beak on gloaming greyed glass. The nightmare head clicks from side to side, a mindless cam. Ice-chip eye blinks as if checking progress, then tap horn of beak on weather-brittled window. Finally a nonchalant lift, then flap out and over the surf.

Kelly woke at 8.04am. Deborah's bed had not been slept in. He stayed in another hour, then telephoned the police at 9.15am.

It may have been those little things

Wading the scum-tipped feelers of expiring waves, a single gull jerks along the margin, sky stretching out across its greasy eye.

FIVE GEARS IN REVERSE

1

Minor tonalities arrive with the middle eight. The end of youth nags loudly as Kelly begins to listen for the body's slow but inevitable failure. (Initiating auto-destruct.) What of the clover-shaped mole on his back? He imagines nuclei berserking blue through a skin specialist's eye, the brown smear now grown in size and syllables to a melanoma. The prostate gland in his book is more like a lychee than a walnut but what if it swells, should he submit to the probing rubber fingers or take his chances? (Grammar rays claim no remission from this spreading dis-

modern death builds a non-dramatic ending

ease) Kelly admits he has become an emotional scavenger. At the weekend he walks in the park with a friend who discusses suicide as readily as opening a can of soup and barely listens to the justifications and doubts he has heard so many times before. As the magpies flutter on wooden benches he feels needed but waits with dread for the day when his exacting friend will find a better listener with a wider repertoire of comforting noises.

Later they discuss Kelly's ejection from a city nightclub and the newspaper article that followed a few days after. Unable to tolerate two males dancing together the bouncer, with no tact and permed hair, had asked him to leave. Kelly surprised himself by the success of his argument, the squirming waitress and her apologies for the unconcern of the

club manager, all this while female couples gyrated to the approved appraising eyes of verifiable men home from real work.

in terms of a yellow body appropriated by

The story printed the day after he phoned the newspaper in disgust is closely followed by a few snide lines in a subsequent editorial. As he listens to his friend he realises his own uncomplexity and what home truths these public words tell about himself.

He's a pansy guy

Says a small boy today as he waits for the car to be unlocked by his parents outside kindergarten. Kelly laughs.

What did you say?

Asks the father. His son wears red shorts and a fluorescent green t-shirt with an orange cat.

He's a pansy guy.

Kelly smiles. The man just looks back and says nothing.

2

(Organelles spun in a terminal reel became words miscued, miswritten)

Sony express circuits wipe the blank screen fluorescent and instantly build a loser's room on the edge of a desert a de- somewhere south of Reno. In a black covered dentist's chair striped by the sunlight, a shirtless man sits mesmerised by a game show. Watching the screen within the screen, Kelly notices the details intended to suggest a marriage on the rocks. (Graffitied with fragments.) Bright prints hang skew-whiff from shaded corners, a suitcase stands blocking the bedroom and outside, rattling the screen door, wind lifts orange dust.

plastic tubes and gadgetry.

Across a channel another less artful catastrophe. What angers in this presentation is the contrast. As the planes calmly unload their bombs through a brochure calm sky, the

falling grey capsules detonate and burst with pursing shock waves like cherries dropped in blancmange.

Did they call it 'pacification' then? What story are they telling now? Where is the authority in this confusion of intercuts? Bomber Harris, the voice of doom, drops not incendiaries here but Home Office euphemisms as his decorated figure alternates with soundless footage of Dresden hellfires and a few of the more recognisable corpses specially rounded up for the occasion.

Winding out its last reel everything is alright as the story gives way to real and Dresden has risen from the flames, an arrogant forgetting sweep of plexiglass reflections and multinational head offices, hardly interrupted by the (spreading) commercials that come between.

For Kelly, other people's disasters are a necessity. The burning city, the chewed pram charred and crashlanded in front of walless smoky rooms define depression in a life curiously free from death and trauma.

The plot works its spread, sheds expendable

Dreamwalking he imagines the death of his mother and father. He finds no reaction to go with this event, no authentic grief, only postures false as a vaudeville smile and as easy as lying.

This night's narrative builds its habitual mad prism. What was the word at the top of the screenplay, 'sleazy' or 'seedy' as Schwarzenegger, pectorals imaginable through a too tight blue suit, swaggers into the predictable motel room and stows his ballistics (all nine inches?) under the bed? But this is Chicago not Dresden. Chicago home of the hot-dog fat cop, the hooker who bounces her spit on the sidewalk and the black pigeon wise street stool (waxing dysplastic.) Winding a coin into the paymeter above the TV, Schwarzenegger gazes with disapproval as it jerks into life and presents a horizontal couple performing ecstasy. "Capitalism", he sneers and snaps it silent. What profundities lie behind the stereotypes though and what is the implication when TV becomes its own subject of discussion?

Written as large as flames from Dresden firestorms, a loop of smoke fills the screen now, shifting shape like an ink drip dropping through water. Death for many becomes the self-mutilation of one. The blue filament rises from the end of a cigarette, which we are told is responsible for the amputation of this man's legs. (Wreck the things we love.)

There is something shocking about it too. Thesis becomes prosthesis as the message is spelt out in the pan that takes us from the glowing cigarette tip to crossed metal legs, the horror somehow completed by the identical and lifeless rubber shoes.

body parts under the slice of surgical steel.

The story called TV changes its rhythm and on the beat with two New York cops, Kelly watches another type of death investigated. Graphic, powerful, the robbery is shown through re-construction and an autopsy report on the murder victim. It is the assailant who screams as he pins down the disarmed security guard. "Punch him out, punch him out!" cries his accomplice. The image is brief before the orienting break but clearly the cause of death is the ballpoint pen which still juts from the victim's ear, though most of it is hidden, pushed into his brain.

Bricks and dust, across a channel the building plumes, as the scale is skewed again. (Scalpel it out) This sequence simulates the effect of a nuclear blast, the intact structure surprisingly like the Chicago warehouse where Schwarzenegger terminates the drug dealers with his big weapon.

How is all this configured?

Like a combine harvester a hijacked Greyhound bus snaps the erect twigs of parking meters and slews into the goods train stopped at a level crossing.

The accumulation of objects to be desired, necessary smells, replacements of lifestyle, hair and place, the flirt with death, with exotic destructions, the detergent reality of the soaps are mixed and matched at will. Nothing ends or anymore begins, instead spins an antagonising assemblage of cheapskate linearites.

Deferral Erasure Interruption Evasion, stand-in, meta- this or that, for some kind of explanation, but when A leads neither to B nor C and doh ray mee, one two three, baby you and me, number among the immolations, what final word is there for Kelly the man in the chair, beginning now an ending, as Sony superheterodyne receivers across the world resist closedown, the end of transmission, and ping-pong the next episode in ball bearings of static?

3

(Palpation. Breath in. Can sir?)

Five Gears In reverse.
You think I don't know what I'm doing,
Another fashionable first,
Like walking down the road to ruin.
If you're safe and sound,
Don't let me interrupt you,
And if you're gagged and bound,
How can I corrupt you ?

- Elvis Costello *Get Happy*

Of course, since 'it' took hold these parts are not you anyway.

4

Four miles down the dusty trail and another one past the prefabs of Mendecino County holding penitentiary, Kelly slipped the clutch (loving to brake) and tried for third gear again. Bleary yellow headlights barely lit the way and did nothing to relieve the sky purpling to black nor the menace of redwoods, the nearest hitch-hiking in Rutger Hauer poses.

California. Dreaming. Like a hole in the head. Free. Media-ly hypertrophised Spandex Venice beach body-pop exercise performances. That slight exquisite shadow in your face is not on the printout as the camera on Fisherman's Wharf converts you into machine codes and the next sale at seven dollars. From Baker beach the big bridge tears a postcard sky that requires no enhancement by filtration.

Kerouac got California right. Families with cool-pac picnic hampers dot the Big Sur coastline as the cliffs slip into the sea. Body odours have undergone a recession as these sun girls swivel their designer faces, ray banned from no imaginable pleasure. A fairground attraction that sends those who can afford it running for their aromatherapists, the express drop of a Macy's elevator converts the fear of falling into a repeatable thrill,

another bland consumable. Nothing refers to anything else, Chinatown, the ghetto, Clint Eastwood's place in Sausalito, the old men who try and pick you up on Haight and Ashbury.

These plastic scenes inexorably render a Fauvist narrative but what of the fictional space north of Santa Rosa, where Chandler never took Marlowe asleuthing? Places like Eureka, Ukiah and Fort Bragg. Here the grammar of modern culture glitches just the same but something else mixes in. Maybe it's the heat, 119 degrees by the readout above the bookstore. Amid exotic violences, nuclear families clear the decks of order, disintegrate into less than zero and trade in their babies for Chevrolets.

Walking down the main street in Fort Bragg, Kelly watches a black woman cross to the dry cleaners. Distracted by this novel sight, unable to orient the revelation, a pristine station wagon mounts the curb, crashes into a lamppost and hurls two mountain bikes from the roof rack onto the sidewalk.

Drugged by chemotherapy, you misspell your name,

(These pages caught a, shall we say, growth)

Three miles down the dusty trail, breasts, thighs and hearts are dismembered in the brain of Charles Ng. Escaping from the penitentiary had been easy, a message from God to continue his mission. He had listened for the approach of the jeep running (Braking) in high gear and watched it labour past. A short while later the engine had stopped abruptly with a hopeful crunch. Ng guessed a wrecked transmission at least. Only a mile or so up the road. Another Victim.

Slewed into the bank on a tricky corner, Kelly decided to leave the headlights on as he abandoned the jeep and headed back for the cabin. Third gear had always been stiff but this time not even double de-clutching fooled the worn synchromesh and the superannuated US army sprockets had stripped and splintered with a scream. Almost a scream of pain.

London had beaten him. The doctor said he merely needed rest and had debarred Kelly from the luxury of a nervous breakdown. This trip to California took organisation and even then he found himself not on the firewatch as he had hoped but counting redwoods instead. The forest was vast. At midday only an occasional logging truck or dis-tant chain saw would interrupt its ordered sound.

Those West London streets, like broken Christmas presents, still ran through his mind though (Ng rioting through this machine) and did their best to sabotage Kelly's effort

to write an event into his life intended to read 'my year in California.' He had envisaged the forest in terms of escape. Peculiar how six thousand miles made no difference and still he felt that same Sundae morning shabbiness in everything, dragging his life into an unbearable grey continuum.

fumble the pen; hide your falling hair.

Down the dusty trail, another mile into the forest, he thinks about the cleanness of pain (Breaking,) the extreme love he has for frightened eyes, that fascinating (Ng) moment when they lock on something far away and the struggle stops. Soon he will begin listening for other footsteps in the dust.

Even by forcing his eyes wide open, Kelly could not overcome his night blindness. He walked slowly and felt for the dust of the trail beneath his feet, once or twice straying onto the hard earth of the verge on either side. Although there was no moon, the stars were visible now and Kelly recognized the plough, its points of light disturbingly skewed from what they had been at home, like an emblem of something wrong. When he looked back, the lights of the jeep glowed through the trees, yellowing now as the battery ran itself down.

He would resist the fear required for this situation. Just like the movies he couldn't watch anymore where a man walking through a door became not a single movement but a series of different takes, maybe interrupted by several days. The director's 'action', the extras providing appropriate background movement, until the door framed at the focal point would open and there was the leading man, perhaps unable to remember the shot where he had opened the door from the other side. Life was like that. Unconvincing.

They're quite right, you do come apart at the seams,
especially after radiotherapy

An unsatisfactory victim, the woman in the trailer park had summoned intruders before he could complete his necessary work. All this with a knife sticking from her throat. Then there were the cops and his jaw broken in three places with the slash of a nightstick.

At this point on the trail Kelly got down in the dust on his hands and knees. (Tumour spreading.) If he was walking in the right direction, the lights of the cabin would

soon come into view and maybe he would hear the voices of the other surveyors outside, drinking beer. He felt around for the jeep tracks. The road forked a mile or so from camp, the other trail winding deep into the forest, an old logging route, grown over by weeds and blocked with branches.

which leaves your skin burnt and body weak.

(You moved words/wards. Another four walls of institutional cream.)

elly couldn't be certain but decided to follow the left fork for fifteen minutes then turn back and try the other one if no lights appeared. A pair of starlit eyes approached. Chest height, too close together for a human, too low for a bear. The inquisitive deer ran off into the bushes. But then there was a grey shape ahead, not an animal nor a dead tree, lly strained his weak eyes against the integrate darkness. Run for the trees but never find the trail again and stay out until morning. Even from a few yards baffling it moved, but vision so unreliable. Through the other side of the hairpin the lighted cabins and above the rushing of blood haerd (spelling atrocity,) misfiring the camp generator.

After a while there's very little of you left to have an ending.

At night sound carries a long way in the forest. Charles Ng hiking for more than thirty minutes before losing the sound of feet tramping in the dust. The going becoming tricky tripping twice on fallen branches. More than lost (Loving to break)

elly took the pickup out to drag the jeep before a logging truck. Like a smile from camp stopped ash looked. The side of the dusty trail stood jammed into the earth cracked and dry as a milepost. ly had not noticed this dis(SUBJECT de ADVERBIAL lided ADVERBIAL leted OBJECT)ease.

5

Five Gear Reverse. Ng, the forbidden weakly verb. More than lost, tramping clearly a milepost before tripped branches. Hairpin blood misfiring. Follow the left, his starlit chest rationalized, down the winding deep blocked dusty trail.

He knew

Walking in the lights of voices with a knife throat jaw broken in three by the appropriate background leading man. Wrong verge locks the verb dragging in terms of West Streets but a chain saw the nervous breakdown, the scream almost a victim with breasts running in high.

He knew that (the gape of a subordinate)

To continue, zero titillates imaginable pleasures banned as the seven dollar slip converts exquisite California into a hitch bleary trail hiking past four miles.

He knew that on the first day of school

Bound to interrupt mutilated linearites.

Something was wrong. The man in the chair

Let me ruin you in five. Little tables. Ping-Pong. A C B 3 1 2. Detergent hair-flirts with horror shoes train erect Greyhounds in break death, the autopsy dance. The show a prosthesis pan, a coin-jerk ectasy.

Telling him

Let me. Hooker dogs stow sleazy night prisms in vaudeville and posture authentic depression. Ruin you.

Off for

Wall-less death interrupted by forgetting commercials. This corpse occasion, an authority intercut, a brochure burst of pursing cherries.

Writing his name.

Bright points rattle a shirtless man somewhere on the loser's fluorescent express.

KAY

Nothing smiles at a pansy.

EEE

Red shorts listen in disgust to squirming middleweight youth-stories.

ELL

Exacting weekend magpies scavenge swelling plastic walnuts.

ELL

Syllables berserk loudly in a minor key to the bend.

WHY?

LONG DIVISION

Epitaphs. Obituaries.
Washed down with snivelling little wreaths.
Black-edged bells, smoke wafts from iron flue,
Please rest in peace and I loved you.
Kicked the bucket. Done 'erself in,
Better off in the loony bin.
Armbands, slow march and pricey urn,
Thanks to propane, this stiff will burn.

Curtains drawn at number three,
Twitch because nosey longs to see.
'Im and 'er as thick as thieves,
Make their hobby others' disease.
Talk during the commercial breaks,
Impetigo and dandruff flakes.
Goiter, prolapse, itch, cystitis,
Glaucoma, wind and bronchitis.

Taste flavours of the seamy side,
Compost perfumes and memories fried.
Crack along with their daily drill,
Swallow the lie, 'she was too ill'.

Nice little sister sweet Mr sister mister miss her

Goodbye girl. Though she is still here, logarithmed by divided doors, neither open or closed. Record sleeves skewiff on the gray carpet, speaker hiss and chips of red and green on the minimal console, so pricey she had to find that other job. Here in floating points, a pink tack, over there by the duct an abandoned penny. Treble clefs of hair in shower, on the oatmeal soap. Here, the total factorised into operations not performed. Final demands in red, the jewelled tendril of that exotic brooch still on the coffee table unsoldered. Open files of her plonked around the bedroom. Inevitable knickers and other arrested things,

records no needle can follow.

Heroines on the wall. Bette Davis. Katherine Hepburn, (a diaphanous still from *The Philadelphia Story*.) Dorothy Rothschild. Pauline Black. They smoulder sultry into dead

space. Phone blips, distracted by the party line. What if it should ring? Those eager to console with lowing formulas of nothing.

Divorce, because forever doesn't mean forever anymore. The Riot Act has been read. Her gray maisonette feels like a divorce. Air still hurts in the imprinted rooms. Anger of loneliness lines the walls, drifts into a sourness, spiteful as Joan Crawford hanged in the bathroom. Off the cuff, this place wears a heart out on its sleeve, not of oak but balsa wood brittle. Friable. Gray walls like drooping tissues. Space of a long goodbye, a permanent subtraction, a messy, a bitter, a two hundred budget divorce.

Pale-face light, wan through gunmetal blinds

The goodbye girl sighs her last as personal effects puff short breaths from open tea chests. Down, off and for good, shut circuits that digest the static. Clothes drop to break outlines lingering in folds. Vain celluloid eyes glaze cadaverous as the bin liners fill with last traces. Feeling this, in another vein, as murder, a smothering, some kind of rubbing out the miscopied fractions with her message on the answering machine. Barred now from a place called BACK.

Miss her. How I.

+

Existence is rudely fabulated by these events. Can the ending be found in a *True Confessions* denouement where, flanked by black-edged ads for bust improvements and buttock shapers, the world-weary lovers embrace at last and turn in to a yellow-bricked dreamhome? He resists the plot, this sabotage, the shining axe hacked into the natural yoghurt white of his life, a page blank as salt flats (even these the site of another subtraction. Fifty years ago, coachwork of red shot-silk missiles past, just over the record. Pit stop for an axle twist on the not so featureless sands). He spins her records and tries to convince himself that though he wanted them before, now they don't sound the same and they don't but this is them interfering so he too tries to sabotage, ignores those blue notes she liked. (Another attempt in the light drizzle. Just in sight, one wheel lifts and then the car tosses up like an airborne kidney bean, performs a double twist and disintegrates into the sands. The driver, Marlin, clearly lost his head. And control. The crowd disperses,

glee clubs bus it home and Carlo Curley packs up the pipes of his favourite organ.) His mother has left her drug bottles in their place on the sideboard. Ready. The mark of these things is drawn for him not in strong black ink but a porous rash of crayon. (They try moving the red carcass but it is stuck. They cover it up with sand instead. In a week the flats are as featureless as before, as if struck from the record. He lost his head. Probably the drive chain whipping free from the sprocket caught him a blow at shoulder level. That's what they say, the devisers.)

Other events. I imagined diversions to distract, maybe anticipating the failure that did inevitably come. Arousing high falutin' shutters to block the present into an imagined, sealed and complete memory.

For the record, the woman he met at the party had said, "you're a queer fish", as the car stopped in a deserted lane and her gold-rimmed glasses lay on the dash. This is how it happened, he supposed. What had never happened before.

Turning the final corner she had braked too hard on the black ice, spinning the car into a red catherine wheel, him against her. He realized the truth in the dark of 'her lips found his'. Mean and standard deviation. She saw him, white faced, pathetic but with a kind of hopeless intensity behind his ugly brown glasses and he was shivering. Even his long fingers vibrated together.

After the slip she had driven on and then stopped along an overgrown and disused service road. For cold comfort, the engine still ran and the heater blew inside a mechanical smell of burning oil. On the way he had looked straight ahead, her eyes now and then evaluating him through the rear-view mirror. This is how it happened. Her hair was that crimped modern mixture of rust and brown. It looked wet. He wanted to run it between his fingers to see what it felt like, but that was all. He wanted to get out and walk, avoid true confessions, the thing that could only bring the usual grief.

The gear lever stuck up, his mind already manufacturing the farce. Could he rise to the occasion, as it were? There he was again, the dirty jokes of school flooding back in showers, filled with steam and hairing bodies reawakening from rugby in minus temperatures. She looked at him and he did not know what should happen next. Should he close his eyes and think of England?

She took off his glasses. Under his eyes were lilac circles. His skin was not good. He looked ill but most of all puzzled, uncomfortable, unaroused. "You're a queer fish", she said.

Her skin was smoother than he thought it would be. She stroked her face against his, him feeling the butterflies of her eyelashes. Was this the real thing? Across his lips she ran her fingers. Down his neck. Would he lose his head? He looked out in pain through the glass at the point in the dark where the headlights faded, flinching at her foreign body, wanting this to stop like those fairground rides that gave him panic attacks. Made a victim, the control rods out, a sure derailment, fear of over exposure, roll red then breaking across the sands, shriek as Antony Braxton winds up his soprano, killing him softly, crossing his minefields, him wanting to reach only STOP

tongueless shouts of filth

Dick
Plonker
Piledriver
Whanger
Leave me
Crank
Rhythm stick
Alone
Pumped up
Brought off. Jacked off. Jerked off.
Crumpet
Crack
Bush
Bit of skirt. Piece of tail.

SCREAMING BLUE MURDER

Don't tamper. Inter fear.

Staring tight-lipped beyond the yellow pools of light outside, into grotesque dead shadows.

After, she wonders but must master her own desperation, steel herself to shore up the shattered dreamhome to which she must return. His narrow shoulders rock, as outside he struggles with the frozen latch of his basement flat. She watches from the driver's seat then pulls away. On a corner the red car again spins in the winter freeze.

+

His mind, in time, tricks this out as a double voice, in a loving memory. The event replayed with intruding spoiler signals, that hide insupportable shames of panic and capitulation, that facelift the violation of significant places and put things in the pink. A record, re-chorded into the sweet smile of a different tune. Coming up roses. Like that dirty tape, his wavering voice hand in glove with the unerased nightmare man, running backward.

He tells the authorised version in party lines to a friend and believes it himself. This is how it happened. Beaten to the punch. A party-girl pick-up. The event now violated like the art gallery frieze dissolved by sulphur dioxide rain.

The cheapest of tricks.

A few days later, in the fake bohemian cafe, she levels with him. He holds her hand, exquisitely small. She is writing their epitaph. Outside, cars go places over the bridge. Through the window, he watches dust and garbage sweep along, free in the breeze, only to get trapped in the winter fissures that streak the road.

She is not sure if he listens. His expression, always that same maddening intensity. Sitting there, painstakingly fashionable but crumpled, he is divided from the world, doomed. She cannot avoid the ugliness when he cries, as if he has not done so for years. There are her own problems. Just back on her feet after the breakup, the children settled, her struggle to hold on to the new lover.

Her hand is so small. He had not meant this to happen. But then he breaks down not for her but all those other things, the lonely nights and weekends that were to make him despising and angry, a person self-subtracted from life's tapestry. Shot with his own gun.

They leave and she guides him into the car. He says nothing and sits there frigid and untouchable, snivelling from time to time. She cannot reach a sense of loss so major. In the mean time, she makes a mental note to avoid parties, places which hold people whose attractiveness is only their sharing of wordless grief.

I told her the trouble though, before I lost my head. How I cannot afford to feel, how it brings the corpses out, disgorges them in floods, kills the anaesthetics.

On the way back to the car, in the vile wind an old man wearing a gabardine exposes himself from a shop doorway. She says something about a shrivelled priapus and giggles. He says nothing.

+

sister sweet sister

'Little white flowers will never, will never awaken you, not where the black coach of sorrow has taken you'. Love and I have decided to end it all.

Gloomy day

How to think the vacant term of GONE correctly, prime numbered (2,3,5,7), insulated from the picks and shovels of authentic pain. The goodbye girl is gone. That's all. At night though, his mind shuffles its records, an acid screen test of other violences and losses, additions and subtractions, always trying to find the right track, the one that can play this horror with high fidelity.

Love and I have decided

Elastics for the girls, muddy puddles for the boys. This black vinyl band beats rusty netball stands, did-didn't-dids, alcoholic dinner-ladies and cold iron climbing frames. Mary-Anne the frying pan. Banning-boy the teacher's toy. In cold April, spooky-man sets his snares in the allotment that fringes the playing fields. He punctures the footballs kicked over the fence and wears his wife's knickers. So they say. The quiet one nurses his depression unseen behind the idle cement truck. He wears a blue anorak, torn Garfield patch on the lapel.

will his mother be late again?

The inquisitive ones play the exposure game between the terrapins. Geneen lifts her dress, wrenches aside red knickers, shot-silk, stolen from her sister's top drawer, the one full of lon-ger-ree and peek-a-boos. He looks. Red shutter silk flip. Not much to see. 'Show us yours then. Let's see'. Then with Geneen there's Joanne and Debbie and that big snaggle-tooth Linda. Their fingers dig in. 'Leave me alone'. RIP. They have his trousers down, tooth and nail, in a jiffy. 'It's your funeral, goggle face. Cheat. Geneen showed you. Snake eyes'.

he kicks, but the traces come back stronger

Their fingers multiply, grapple him closer. 'Oh', yawns Mrs Beal, and thinks, just another scream. Knock off in ten minutes. Place is like a madhouse. Wonder why those brussel sprouts came out pink last night.

The record is jumping along the groove. The world is watching, private places broadcasted, tampered, interfered with. 'Please stop. Please'. The one o'clock bell is ringing. Axes transform to map a leering dirty man in a flyblown doorway. He capitulates to the execution, their thoughtless hands. 'Seen more meat on a flea's arse'. Collective cackle. They burst off to Miss Ready's botany class.

Goodbye girls

+

Recording mixes down. Raps out these remainders, shop-soiled, in three-four time, a comedy waltz. In her maisonette, now a minus space, the final demands flutter in random draughts. The mix splits and again divides.

+

Strange meeting. She opens the door, the brass zip on a black plastic body bag. They have said nothing on the way. He will not see her again. Outside the red car, snow blows around aimlessly, spreading like indiscriminate correcting fluid. She manages the equation well, keeps him six feet under, goodbyes must be conducted properly. She has calculated this sense of an ending.

The comfortable record splays into corners where the functional has become meaningful. Stuffed lizard, so funny, at the time. What was the name they had called it? George. They. At the time. Amicable agreements don't keep the wolf from the door, stop this place feeling like a morgue painted in taught goodbyes.

There are no final demands. Forever is forever. He, a slip of a lad, simply an error, a factor dropped in the cross multiplication. A fly in the ointment. Lying in his coffee, spinning clouds in their coffin.

Two. Lumps in the throat. Sweet. Losing you eversomuch

miss sister

Sung by Tammy Wynette so the tiny tots couldn't hear, but built their Lego™ into awkward structures like a sneer. But it goes on. Tracking. Wow and flutter. He stumbles, trips on words, arse over tit. All he can't say and she the one for eye contact, a proper bold Eurydice, whistled away to the bone orchard in a twinkling, to play blind-man's buff with Harry Hearse and Brenda Brown Bread.

Fatal to look back. She calls it 'X-mas', plays a part called functioning in the usual way. No one fooled for a minute, especially the kiddies. Tell 'em straight, " 'e done a runner, y'know, slung 'is 'ook, went awol, forsook 'earth an 'ome". Multiplying phenomenon. A sine of the times.

But he cooperates. Trains lush synthetic streamers of white and green over the treated needle tree bought this morning. He supports her, she will lose her head without him, building this impossible ritual of nothing has changed. They collude, but who is being taken in? These clay ornaments, the closest thing we've got to family heirlooms, she says. Made by the children. People, he supposes. Gargoyle faces atop leprosy-contorted bodies. Chipped. One decapitated. "We gave up gluing it". Even then they knew about the playground twisted faces, beams of good health and experimental spite.

She shows him where to hang them

+

His file is made inactive on the ice. Children in bed. A stop on the way back. The squiggly tracks she slashes with her skates sink without a trace into the reflected flame jerking bright from the silver steel column. Cremated into its flat silver foil.

From the sidelines he watches. Another skater jack-knifes across her path and spins off out of control. She dodges, looking back, living dangerously, on a knife edge. Moves faster, reckless for herself or him? It means goodbye, Thanks but no thanks. She whips around the perimeter as if held from the middle by a brittle chain.

Goodbye. The tracks jam, stack up. She didn't say it. Never any keystone to cap this one, finish it off, furnish an ending, a forgetting. Mind extends and multiplies a range of conditionals in the night, plays anthems to remove the blemish of grief. Sweet

the end of the line

'let them not know, that I thought of joining you
that I thought of joining you
that I thought of joining you
that I thought of joining you ...

SOME THINGS HURT MORE, MUCH MORE THAN CARS & GIRLS

It is late afternoon. The one bare light bulb burns a ring into the off-white ceiling as the Vinyl Woman looks out from her room onto the 3D neon relief which advertises others like her, sprung from the same mould. The morning sun has already flung itself through the window and now it is in shade. Heat must be avoided, thinks the Vinyl Woman. Heat stretches her skin, brings a reasonable facsimile of water retention.

On the sign she is an 'Instant Party-Doll'. Her wrist is clasped by the white-gloved hand of a figure in a top hat intended to be a gay young blade. The life of every party, the Vinyl Woman is instantly inflatable and moulded of sturdy flesh-like plastic with a lovely soft-skin finish. She thinks of the thousand uses she offers and moves away from the window.

Latening afternoon. With difficulty she scrapes a clear patch in the litter of plaster left when the building was gutted. The tremors grow more frequent as the demolition crew cut into the foundations. She must avoid the heat. The sign brightens as the light outside fails. 'The life of every party'. Her thousand uses. She looks down and speaks, 'Is it finishing? Is it finishing?'

On the lam. This, her bolt-hole, a place to hide from the thousand slipping clutches. Sick of dirty tricks (sit on me face luv and I'll guess yer weight,) one night the Vinyl Woman called it a day, knocked off, fucked the dog and came here. People outside pass by and wonder at the single lighted window burning in the empty shell.

With a bent nail on bare walls she has scraped messages, write as rain. She has to keep out of the heat. Discarded on the floor, first the telephone had a bad connection then went silent. The line is dead.

The Vinyl Woman recalls thousands of others' nights out. All the little triggers, she learned them all. Spots to squeeze or probe for pain and pleasure, depending on the preference. Tricks to turn, to tide her over, wash her through evenings with companions keen as mustard in halls where the laughter came in cans.

Her messages cannot be read. Jagged zig-zags in no language. She must wait for the rain to run down the walls and soften what thin skin of plaster remains.

The fortune fish in the palm of her hand squirms and curls its tail. 'Expect an important development soon'. She has memorised the interpretations.

But a signing off is felt by the Vinyl Woman. As her electric image intensifies from the window, she rolls like dice the reasons, far too many, for this intuition. Articulacy has no place here. The fish curls its fins, more dicey this time, more safe. 'Expect a disappointment'. She knows now that nothing can be done, that no part of herself could ever be shut up, kept perfect, that all must be laid on the line, left out to spoil. Nothing comforts anymore. Everything outside has become an antagonism. The building vibrates again. She hates. It's simple. Survival is in not seeing or hearing much. The Vinyl Woman asks, 'Is it finishing? Is it finishing?'

-Can I ponce a fag off you?

She turns from tricks of production to her addiction, this in the unevenly decorated home of the film-maker, absent fighting causes in deepest Peru.

For the moment, the footage has stalled.

-Can I ponce a fag off you?

The Vinyl Woman hears this question. Across from the kitchen she watches the dark-haired woman and the man, his back to thick-spined books of Japanese erotic art. From the next room dangles the silly voice,

-Can I ponce a fag off you?

Swapping moves, the question is directed along the correct pine table at the whippetish young director. He performs the removal of a filter cigarette and rolls it to the girl, the way Kurt Russell might have done it given intensive rehearsal. Fingers twisted artistic and sensitive, comfy in no-name film-maker denims, her screenplay is in front of him. A script-tease. The scene is set.

The Vinyl Woman moves to the couple in the other room. Past the gate, again the frames run and scratch. They agree the place is ugly, haphazard, self-consciously ethnic. The only music is bad recordings of Astor Piazzolla and the TV will not tune.

-What do you reckon about those two?

Are they going to fuck? says the darkly-hennaed woman.

Women
Let me tell you about 'em
Can't live with 'em
Can't live without 'em
The ones you like
only seem to hate you

-Oh God, the man replies, disgustedly.

Through the kitchen wafts a dope aroma.

-Why is it always so bloody typical? Where do they learn the moves?

'Back to my place?'

'Sure'

'Let's get mellow'

'Fine'

'Can I fuck your brains out?'

Fine again.

-Can't they bill and coo somewhere else, take their production a long way off before I puke?

-They're going through the motions, she says.

-'Motions' being the operative word. Who's getting the best lines?

But the Vinyl Woman stands unseen at the elbow of the girl. Lithe and laved in terylene spliced with other artificial twills, flocks, slubs and boucles, her industrial boots bob at the ends of warmered legs.

-Can I ponce a fag off you?

The ones you hate
only seem to date you.
Girls will often tell you,
you come on too strong.
You've got to take it slow,
to make the love last long
But I say
the early bird catches the worm,
The late bird gets a girlie
with a two-dollar perm.
Man

That put me in a dilemma,
case in point, a fly-girl
named Gemma.
I met this lady at a quiet place,
about five years ago we were face to face.
I stepped up to her,
tossed the first line,
like fishin' I was wishin'
that the girl would be
mine.

Young director obliges obligingly.

-Then we really tweaked up the follow spots, put in extra moles and leikos, the whole monty, thinking we'd really cut out all that post-production crap. The over-exposure gives a really nice flare. Could see it even in the rushes. Come round tomorrow and I'll spin the first reel for you.

In an undertone,

-What about *them* ?

-Oh, he's so creepy, says the girl.

The Vinyl Woman sighs, or maybe it's just a slight deflation of her pneumatic body.

Attitudinizing continues in the kitchen, but always pulls up short of the finishing posed. Outside, a Japanese paper decoration streams from the window. It is the colour of junk-mail fliers.

In the other room the light is low.

-I think they're waiting for us to go to bed, says the dark-haired woman. Let's stay here and cock up Mr Chickendick's tricks.

-God, says the man. To think I fancied her. Doesn't she ever wrap up? Jesus! Why don't they just bonk and put us out of our misery. When will it end?

Again, the Vinyl Woman is at the girl's elbow.

-My idea was for a collage, semi-animation effect, using the blue plastic pterodactyls Ronny picked up in Spain, dressed with women's briefs painted-up to look bloodstained. Can you imagine a more graphic image?

The young director has not listened. In his dope fogged brain he tries to work out the necessary logistics of the situation, the tricks in need of turning.

She feels a signing-off. There are too many things to be depressed about. The Vinyl Woman leaves them to their devices, the cistern of their finishing straits.

Now through a completed darkness the neon sign bludgeons its ware, crackling, threatening to short in the soggy night. In the wind the gutted building creaks precariously. She can hear debris fall and clatter in the lower floors. Amongst the traces on mildewed walls one word resolves itself: 'Kelly'. The Vinyl Woman has followed his colourless life, its story never quite kicking in to rescue him from his artificial existence. Her skin hardens in the cold but nothing can be done, not since they ripped out the heating. Kelly's hangups are none other than those of the under-confident person, she thinks. Anxiety, fear of abandonment, the centre always illusive. Not all of us are equipped to cope. Like a cigar, the fortune fish curls in her hand. It is finishing for Kelly too.

Signal to noise to cut knife lite across wow and flutter grooves of. Vinyl. Voice off-keyed feigns significance bathed in electronically emulated sounds.

This is the start of the breakdown, and I can't understand you

Personal cat's paw massagers from Japan complete this nosedive into nonsense. Crying Russian women with ECT faces file past the oper coffin because their lungs are sandpaper dry. Thirty-two channels, together, mean nothing. Riddled and raped bodies, scarpered, scuppered of shock.

'Lay me here in hideous darkness', thinks the Vinyl Woman, but her artificial face bleaches blue then white in the relentless play of contrasts on the screen. *This is the start* Flat-stretched behind the glass, forgetting time or place, amnesiac images founder in her synthetic brain.

A fleet of high-masted windmills, aluminium props cleaving the tungsten moonlight, play tricks with the long shadows, as the young director evokes a modern kind of fear. Queering the scene, a woman's face in profile fills the screen. tells a big mistake. Her eyes point across the sand, painted by two pools of light from a truck where a gawky man struggles on the deck to start the generator. He has told her she is a girl in a million, this wearing an excuse for a leather jacket.

Firing up, the motor lights strings of bulbs like a neural network strung between the high-masted windmills and power lines. He runs to the woman. 'Look! Look! Isn't it something special?' Her face is a big mistake; her voice a tone loc. Farewell to love. 'Give me the car keys'. The sand flurries as in boots and khaki she storms off, but then the screen is a dead grey in the Vinyl Woman's artificial brain. If the breakdown cannot be contained then the finish will start, she thinks.

Times are tough for
English babies.
Send the army and the
navy.
Beat up strangers who
talk funny.
Take their greasy
foreign money.
Skin shop. Red
leather hot-line. Be
prepared for the
engaged sign.
Bridal books,
engagement rings and
other wicked little
things.

But her marks grazed into the wall mean nothing. From outside the Vinyl Woman plays in neon on the ceiling. Nothing can be kept perfect, sealed from tricks, it all gets cocked up. Clangers and bombshells get dropped.

In a bright pulse of artificial light she finds her wad of newspaper cuttings. Slipped unseen to the floor, the fortune fish lies flat in a gruelly puddle. The Vinyl Woman slowly reads them over.

Handsome male, 24, 6'1", 140lbs, great physical condition,

seeks attractive slim female for fun times. Recent photo and phone no. appreciated. Take a chance, good things may happen.

Woman, 31, single, seeks Man 18-35. I like nature animals etc., Box TC41, **Chiswick Daily News.**

Battersea Female, 29, wishes to meet same to share varied interests. Reply to Box E319, Acton Herald.

She works it out. Meditations of how people imagine they should be seen. Already set for a stall on chapter one. Outside, the sign pales anaemic as the morning light comes up and the demolition crew clock on. Finishing resumes. The day is dateless.

The Vinyl Woman recollects Kelly's dice with the lonelyhearts columns. Evenings of dis-ease. Too much cologne, overdressed, nervous, no conversation because no small talk or backchat, unable to chat or butter up, he only managed to drop gaffs and clangers. Then the aftermath. His date never at home or able to get to the phone, then after some persistence hopeful conversations but only with a dead line. Kelly got the message after a while. It was when he called it a day that she realized they had become doubles. Self-conscious shells. Hard cases to crack.

But the Vinyl Woman is off his case, doesn't realise the anachrony that Kelly kills time in another place. There has been a breakdown in information. Retrieval fails. The power lines are punch drunk as the building judders.

Exit One: Scene of the Fatal Accident.

Heading in a northerly direction at approximately 5.42pm, the victim's car collided with a furniture van on the M4, 500 yards short of junction seven. A cross wind is thought to have blown the van across a lane and caused the fatal collision. The victim suffered multiple injuries and was found dead on arrival at the General Hospital. Mr Bye, in charge of the other vehicle, escaped with bruises.

Signal to noise. Vinyl melody melds plaintive minor ninths finishing lines punched with American chords.

You drove me almost drove me out of my head

Vinyl Leafs a Hefner Prettytext to Love.

she lost her desire to travel the world when she fell in love with the world famous homebody and became his Playmate for a Lifetime

Playboy Mansion West yips and squeals even on nonparty days

"My bum is the problem," says the living doll, "it could be better, I could

the stage was set for another chapter in this classic tale of love and marriage

goodhearted rogue falls for the magic of a good woman

set for another chapter

stylish slacks to suit your pocket,
Back supports and picture lockets.
Sleepy towns and sleeper trains,
To the dogs and down the drains.
Major roads and ladies' smalls,
Hearts of oak and long trunk calls.

Paper Scrip-Tease Action Sequence.

Signing from behind a cocked Hasselblad, the young director guides her pose, skin and hair, calculating to maximise appeal when the special edition hits the news-stands. The scene is tricked out in panelled wood warmed by fireglow; orchids with entrail stigmas and assorted dogs. Thighs are shot with studied care. Electric fans play through the halogen flare.

"Kill the spots". Her skin cannot be damaged. The young director calls it a day. The session is over.

Later, as the wide negatives stretch to dry in his studio he cleans his airbrush, feeling horny.

Continental interference, at death's door with life insurance.
Standing in your socks and vest, better get it off your chest,
Every day is just like the rest,
But Sunday's best.

she lost her desire

The Vinyl Woman fans this magazine then whips it sliding across the soiled concrete. The building trembles, cants backwards a few degrees exposing from the window a few more inches of blazing neon. In its puddle the fortune fish bellies up. Red

dye bleeds from its underside, nothing ever more than a Christmas cracker novelty. She remembers a movie from her days on the beat, a Western, the gun-slinger with a music box, the gunfight always coming after the tune had played its way through and finished.

Magazine Woman, a finished product, she thinks. Hef wants us all to know just what he's been getting into, so to speak. Letting the Playboy manor slip. Jerk-off fodder in two dimensions for old wankers in soiled raincoats. The Vinyl Woman snarls and scatters her wad of cuttings.

Exit Two: Recovered Accident Mechanisms

The black box recorder had coded an invaluable data profile, one that explained the magnitude of the victim's injuries. At impact time +0.3 secs, the decelerometer had registered 6.7, with a roll and yaw value of 3.9. Thus, the impact velocity would have been in the region of 77.3 mph (123.7 km/h). At 0.4 secs, the collapsible steering wheel had failed, breaking free from its moorings, to first crush then embed itself in the victim's abdomen. Parts of the structure were recovered from the body. The reason for this failure is as yet unknown.

Parallel Timeslip

Outside is holding its breath as if before a storm. Then, like a clapperboard snap, the charges beneath the building detonate. Outside the sign reels into full view, a self-satisfied synthetic leer, as the walls crumple and twist around the Vinyl Woman spraying her skin with slivers of tile and glass and then in a roar this scene is a blur, gone forever, a frame dismantled, a no-story, a never-was story.

Some Things Hurt More

The dead man in his postmodern motley, a risky pseudo-ethnic mush, is an X that marks the spot for bicepsed minds, cleaned and jerked behind eyes reed thin shunted to Nintendo™ brains.

Dress. To Kill. Gore. Tech tips for the leisure-minded. Achieve an object. Sneaker sure-footed. Cap sighs, netted with vinyl red and black. Aid the sight in sites of leisure.

Vinyl out of the picture. Junked.

The dead man always was invisible to these parti girls. Maximally factored, they aim to please. Lounging by screw pools, bust of times expectant, these girls with their enlightened hair dream of fringe benefits and go by hair say.

Trained telescopically. The coverboys sight the dead man in cross hairs. Ex marks. Ease little triggers and let fly chords vocal, backslapped by bodies Elle airbrushed, sleek cheeked and sunkissed cool. Maybellined, Bioplexed and Buttercremed. Pipefish pink, suckers for graceless caffeine-free guise, all Ri-Ri zippers and exterior labels. Done to a tee.

Vinyl. Solution. Straw.

Exit Three: Downside of the Split-Second Epic

last of all Dale, I suppose I should tell you that Kelly was killed in a road accident three weeks ago. Although I hadn't spoken to him for 18 months it was a great shock. More so because it happened the day we went on holiday and I read about it in a local paper on Monday. He had been to Wales for a few days and coming back through Shropshire a furniture van was blown across the road in front of him and Kelly's car just went straight into it killing him instantly. It is all very sad.

Vinyl Finish

-Gawd, what a shambles.

-It's called docklands redevelopment me old china. Like it or lump it.

-My mum used to come 'ere in the war with 'er ration book in 'and. You got used to that powdered egg.

-O blimey! Nostalgia! All we need. Somehow Lev I don't think you're cut out for demolition. Antiques would be more your line or selling flowers.

-Lay off yer cheeky bastard.

-Well, come on. Let's make a start on clearing this rubble so they can get on with building their little palace. Before you know it the only people living 'ere will be them fuckin' yuppies they're always talking about.

-'Ere. Wot's this?

-What's what?

-This.

-You mean that crumpled up thing?

-Yeah. Pulled me up short for a second. Thought it was a body.

-Come again?

-A body.

-Drag it out.

-Well I never. It's one of them dolls, you know, for them poor buggers that can't pull a real bird. How about tackin' it to the foreman's door?

-You daft git, you'll get us the push. Put it down, you don't know where it's been.

-How could anyone fancy that? Plastic!

-Don't knock it till you've tried it mate. No backchat anyway.

-That's true.

-Come to think of it I read something in last week's paper. Some fellas get really attached to them. You know. Love. Doesn't bear thinking about does it?

-Bloody nora!

-Straight up mate. Straight up.

Thanks to the staff of Humpty's Egg Place, 109st & 87th Ave, Edmonton.
Special Thanks to Mary, Greg, Marilyn, Luke, Val, John & Lynne.

Mr Scotten's hair by Brenda at Propaganda, Edmonton.
Wardrobe by High Level Clothing, Value Village, Zoryana and Artworks. Necklaces by Keen Neckworks.
Original Doc Marten shoes imported from Sprite '57, Leeds, England.
Recorded and mixed on a seven day weekend in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, using an Apple Macintosh SE FDHD and a LaserWriter II.

Song Credits: Elvis Costello, The Smiths, Anne Peebles, Tears for Fears, Julie London, Billie Holiday, Young MC, Chris Difford, Roxy Music, Prefab Sprout, plus numerous late 70s punk combos.

THE END OF THE BOOK